# An evaluation of the effectiveness of the integrated tutor model in Open and Distance Learning: A case of Unisa

**by**

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# DECLARATION

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I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution

_____ _____

Signature Date

# DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis, to my parents, my beloved mother, Christina Siphiwe Sibiya and my late father, Ebenezer Msindo Sibiya, who will always be a source of inspiration in my life. They encouraged me to continue studying, achieving the highest qualification and be what I always dreamt of becoming. Thank you, mama for your continued prayers!

Yes, this was not an easy journey, but it was worth it.

To God be the Glory!

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# ABSTRACT

The provision of education through an open and distance learning (ODL) mode calls for institutions of higher learning to provide support services that can respond to students' needs and expectations, and impact positively on their learning experiences. Tutorial support is one of the pillars of student support services which contribute to the academic success of students in this academic context. The use of technology has led institutions of higher learning to change the way support is provided to students by integrating online learning to reach students who cannot attend traditional face-to-face (F2F) tutorials at a specified time and venue. The University of South Africa (Unisa) responds to these global changes by integrating F2F and online services to support its students through the integrated tutor model (ITM) which seeks to address the learning needs and expectations of students. The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of this ITM. The study was guided by a social constructivist theory of learning supported by connectivism, empathy theory and Salmon's five stage model of e-learning. The fundamental theory of social constructivism is based on the assumption that learning is constructed in a social setting before individuals engage with knowledge. The experiences of individuals play a big role in the construction of knowledge hence it is crucial to acknowledge their prior knowledge. Students who are supported through the ITM in the six Unisa regional service centres and the Unisa staff involved in the implementation of the ITM participated in the study. A purposive sampling technique was used to select these participants. A random sampling technique was also used to sample students to complete a questionnaire. Qualitative data were collected through individual and focus group interviews and documents analysis. The findings of this study reveal that the ITM is not quite ffective as it partly meets the students' needs and does not meet students' expectations. This is because Unisa offers students' needs such as F2F and online tutor support for some modules. However, students' expectations in terms of receiving teaching by tutors, provision of assignment aswers to students, fully fledged resource provision in the learning centres and receiving technical support from tutors are not met.

In light of the findings, the study contributes to the ITM by identifying and filling its gaps using the Context, Input, Process and Product (CIPP) model of evaluation. The improvements will assist Unisa to relook at the ITM to intensify its support for students to fully meet their needs and expectations.

**Keywords:** Distance education, distance learning, open distance learning, integrated tutor model, tutoring, interaction, quality, Africanisation and evaluation.

# NGAMAFUPHI

Uhlelo lokuhlinzeka ngemfundo olusebenzisa uhlelo oluvulekile nohlelo lokufunda ukude (ODL) linxusa amaziko emfundo aphakeme ukuthi anikeze anikeze izinsiza ezixhasayo ezingabhekana nezidingo nezinhloso ezilindelwe kubafundi kanti futhi zinomthelela omuhle ohlelweni lwabo lokufunda. Uxhaso lweThuthoriyali ngolunye lwezinsika zemisebenzi yokuxhasa abafundi olunegalelo kwimpumelelo yabafundi kwezemfundo kulesi sizinda sezemfundo. Ukusetshenziswa kobuchepheshe sekuholele amaziko emfundo ephakeme ukuba aguqule indlela abafundi abaxhaswa ngayo – ngokuhlanganisa uhlelo lokufunda nge-inthanedi ukufinyelela abafundi abangeke bakwazi ukuya kumathuthoriyali okuhlangana nabafundi ngobuso nobuso (F2F) ngesikhathi kanye nendaweni enqunyiwe.. INyuvesi yaseNingizimu Afrika (Unisa) ibhekene nalezi zinguquko zomhlaba ngokuhlanganisa uhlelo lwe-F2F kanye nezinsiza zohlelo lwe-inthanedi ukuxhasa abafundi bayo ngokusebenzisa imodeli ehlanganisiwe yamatjhutha (ITM) efuna ukwanelisa izidingo zokufunda kanye nezinhloso ezilindwe abafundi. Ucwaningo beluqonde ukuhlola ukusebenza kahle kohlelo lwa le ITM. Ucwaningo belulandela ithoyori ebizwa nge-*social constructivist theory of learning* ngokuxhaswa ukuxhumana (*connectivism)*, i-*empathy theory* kanye nemodeli yokufunda kaSalmon yezigaba ezinhlanu. Ithiyori yokuqala yokwakhiwa komphakathi isuselwa phezu komqondo wokuthi ukufunda kwakheka ngaphansi kwesizinda sabantu ngaphambi kokuthi abantu bahlangane nolwazi. Ulwazi abantu abahlangabezana nalo ezimpilweni zabo ludlala indima esemqoka ekwakhiweni kolwazi, kanti-ke kubalulekile ukwamukela ulwazi lwabo lwangaphambilini. Abafundi abaxhaswa ngohlelo lwe-ITM ezikhungweni ezisebenzayo eziyisithupha zezifunda kanye nabasebenzi ababandakanyeka ekusetshenzisweni kwe-ITM bazibandakaye kulolu cwaningo. Indlela yesampuli enezinhloso isetshenziselwe ukukhetha labadlalindima, kanti ngakwenye ingxenye indlela yokuksampula yinoma ngubani isetshenzisiwe ukusampula abafundi ukuba baqede umbhalo wemibuzo. Idatha eyencike kwingxoxo iqoqwe ngokusebenzisa izinhlolovo zabantu kanye namaqembu aqondiwe kanye nokuhlaziywa kwemibhalo. Ulwazi olutholakele lwalolu cwaningo luveza ukuthi i-ITM ayisebenzi kahle njengoba yanelisa izidingo zabantu ngokwesigamu, kodwa lolu hlelo lwe-ITM alufinyeleli izinhloso

zabo ezilindelwe. Lokhu kungenxa yokuthi i-Unisa ifeza izidingo ngokuhlinzeka, isibonelo, ngohlelo lokufundisa lwe-F2F kanye nohlelo lwe-inthanedi lwamatshutha uma kunesidingo sabanye omojuli. Yize-kunjalo, izimpokophelo ezilindelwe ngabafundi mayelana nokuhlinzekwa ngemfundo eyethulwa ngamatshutha, ngokunikezwa izimpendulo zama-asayimenti kubafundi, ngokusebenzisa imithombo eqotho ezikhungweni zokufunda kanye nokuthola uxhaso lwesithekinikhali oluvela kumatshutha akuyona imisebenzi efeza lokhu.

Ngokolwazi olutholakele, ucwaningo lufaka igalelo kwi-ITM ngokwehlukanisa kanye nokuvala izikhala zalo ngokusebenzisa i-Context. I-Input, uHlelo kanye noMkhiqizo (CIPP) okuyimodeli yokuhlola. Izintuthuko zizonceda i-Unisa ukuba ibuyekeze i-ITM ukuqinisa uxhaso lwayo kubafundi ukuze kufezwe izidingo kanye nezinhloso zabo ezilindelwe.

**Keywords:** Imfundo ekude, ukufunda ukude, uhlelo lokufunda oluvulekile nolukude, imodeli ehlanganisiwe yetshutha, ukutshutha, ukuhlangana, izinga, Ukuguqulela izinto kwingqubo yobu-Afrika kanye nokuhlola.

# SETSOPOLWA

Kabo ya thuto ka mokgwa wa go ithuta ga phatlalatša le ga kgole (ODL) o ipiletša go dihlongwa tša thuto ya godimo go fana ka ditirelo tša thekgo tšeo di ka kgonago go arabela dinyakwa le dikemelo tša baithuti le go ama gabotse maitemogelo a bona a go ithuta. Thekgo ya dithutišo ke ye nngwe ya dikokwane tša ditirelo tša thekgo ya baithuti tšeo di tsenyago letsogo go katlego ya baithuti ka mo seemong se sa thuto. Tšhomišo ya theknolotši e dirile gore dihlongwa tša thuto ya godingwana go fetoša ka fao thekgo e fiwago ka gona go baithuti – ka go kopanya go ithuta inthaneteng gore go fihlelele baithuti bao ba sa kgonego go tsenela dithutišo tša setlwaedi tšeo baithuti ba kopanago le bafahloši (F2F) ka phapošing ya bofahloši. Yunibesithi ya Afrika Borwa (Unisa) e arabela ditlhohlo tše tša lefase ka bophara ka go kopanya F2F le ditirelo tša inthaneteng go thekga baithuti ba yona ka go diriša mokgwa wa go ruta wo o kopantšwego (ITM) wo o nyakago go rarolla dinyakwa le dikemelo tša go ithuta tša baithuti. Dinyakišišo di ikemišeditše go sekaseka go šoma gabotse ga ITM ye. Dinyakišišo di hlahlilwe ke teori ya kago ya setšhaba mabapi le go ithuta yeo e thekgwago ke tirišo ya theknolotši thutong, teori ya go naganela ba bangwe le mokgwa wa Salmon wa dikgato tše hlano tša go ithuta. Teori ya motheo ya kago ya setšhaba e theilwe go kwešišo ya gore go ithuta go agwa ka seemong sa setšhaba pele ga ge batho ba ka hwetša tsebo. Maitemogelo a batho a raloka tema ye bohlokwa ka go kago ya tsebo, ke ka lebaka leo go le bohlokwa go lemoga tsebo ya bona ya peleng. Baithuti bao ba thekgwago ka ITM ka disenthareng tša Unisa tše tshela tša ka dileteng le baithuti bao ba kgathago tema ka phethagatšong ya ITM ba tšere karolo ka mo dinyakišišong. Mokgwa wa go dira sampole ka maikemišetšo o šomišitšwe go kgetha bakgathatema ba, mola mokgwa wa go dira sampole ka sewelo o šomišitšwe go dira sampole ya baithuti go tlatša dipotšišo tša dinyakišišo. Tshedimošo ya boleng e kgobokeditšwe ka go botšiša batho ba nnoši le dihlopha dipotšišo gomme gwa dirwa le tshekatsheko ya dingwalwa. Dikutollo tša dinyakišišo tše di utolla gore ITM ga e šome gabotse kudu go fihlelela dinyakwa tša baithuti ebile ga e fihlelele dikemelo tša bona. Se ke ka lebaka la gore Unisa e hlokometše dinyakwa tša baithuti ka go fana ka, go fa mohlala, F2F le thekgo ya baithuti ya inthaneteng go dimotšule tše dingwe. Le ge go le

bjale, dikemelo tša baithuti mabapi le go amogela go rutwa ke bafahloši, go fa baithuti dikarabo tša diasaenemente ke bafahloši, kabo ya methopo ka botlalo ka disenthareng tša thuto le go amogela thekgo ya sethekniki go tšwa go bafahloši ga di fihlelelwe.

Go lebeletšwe dikkutollo tše, dinyakišišo di tsenya letsogo go ITM ka go tseba le go tlatša dikgoba ka go diriša mokgwa wa tshekatsheko wa Seemo, Tšweletšo, Tshepedišo le Setšweletšwa (CIPP). Dikaonafatšo tše di tla thuša Unisa go lekodišiša ITM go maatlafatša thekgo ya yona go baithuti gore e fihlelele dinyakwa le dikemelo tša bona ka botlalo.

**Mantšu a bohlokwa:** Thuto ya kgole, go ithuta o le kgole, go ithuta ga phatlalatša le ga kgole, mokgwa wa go ruta wo o kopantšwego, go ruta, kopanyo, boleng, Go tliša seemong sa Seafrika le tshekatsheko.

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ARCS | Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction |
| ASC | Academic Support Coordinators |
| C-C-I | Content-Content-Interaction |
| CHE | Council for Higher Education |
| CIPP | Context, Input, Process, and Product |
| CMC | Computer Mediated Communication |
| CMS | Course Management System |
| CoL | Commonwealth of Learning |
| COPs | Communities of Practice |
| CPD | Centre for Professional Development |
| DCCD | Directorate for Counselling and Career Development |
| DE | Distance Education |
| DEASA | Distance Education Association of Southern Africa |
| DL | Distance Learning |
| DLA | Digital Learning Advisors |
| DLE | Distance Learning Environments |
| DHEI | Distance Higher Education Institutions |
| DHET | Department of Higher Education and Training |
| DPQA | Directorate: Planning and Quality Assurance |
| ECM | Enterprise Content Management |
| EQAA | External Quality Assurance Agency |
| FYE | First Year Experience |

| | |
|---|---|
| F2F | Face-to-Face |
| HEMIS | Higher Education Management Information System |
| HEQC | Higher Education Quality Committee |
| HFL | Head of Facilitation of Learning |
| HOU | Hellenic Open University |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| ITAS | Indigenous Tutor Assistant Scheme |
| ISLE | Internet-Supported Learning Environments |
| ITM | Integrated Tutor Model |
| L-C-I | Learner-Community-Interaction |
| LMS | Learning Management System |
| MANCOM | Management Committee |
| NADEOSA | National Association of Distance Education Organizations of South Africa |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NPHE | National Plan for Higher Education |
| OBE | Outcome-Based Evaluation |
| ODL | Open Distance Learning |
| OL | Online Learning |
| OU UK | Open University of the United Kingdom |
| POPI | Protection of Personal Information |
| PPT | Participant |
| QA | Quality Assurance |
| RAC | Regional Academic Coordinator |
| SACHED | South African Committee of Higher Education |

| | |
|---|---|
| SADC | Southern African Development Community |
| SAQA | South African Qualification Authority |
| S-C-I | Student-Content-Interaction |
| S-S-I | Student-Student-Interaction |
| STLC | Senate Teaching and Learning Committee |
| S-T-I | Student-Tutor-Interaction |
| T-C-I | Teacher-Content-Interaction |
| TO | Tutorial Officer |
| T-T-I | Teacher-Teache-Interaction |
| TVET | Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| UKOU | United Kingdom Open University |
| Unisa | University of South Africa |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| USA | United States of America |
| VC | Video Conferencing |
| VLE | Virtual Learning Environment |

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# ORIENTATION INTO THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the integrated tutor model at Unisa. Tutor support has become a global phenomenon and practice to enhance teaching and learning in institutions of higher learning. This type of support is part of the cluster of services and facilities offered to distant students entering the institution of higher learning. The main purpose of these student support services is to create a positive learning experience and make the learning journey easier and more interesting for students. Over and above this, tutor support serves as a link between the institution and the students. Kaur (2016:126) is of the opinion that the quality of higher education depends on the student support services provided in various modes of higher education. For any institution of higher learning to function optimally, it needs to have an established and functional student support system. In support of this, Nsamba (2015:7) indicates that "student support services are a vital part of academic success in higher education in general and very critical in Open Distance Learning (ODL) because of the nature of Distance Education (DE)".

The University of South Africa (Unisa) has been supporting students through a tutorial programme conducted face-to-face (F2F) for more than a decade to enhance their academic success and provide them with positive learning experiences. The introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) has revolutionised the way in which the higher education community think, work and provide support services. With the growing need for supporting students, Unisa has introduced the Integrated Tutor Model (ITM) support programme. According to Letseka and Maile (2008:1), South Africa's graduation rate of 15% is one of the lowest in the world. Statistics on post-school education and training in South Africa published by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2013:32) indicate that the throughput rate in distance programmes of South African Universities is 15%. The ITM programme was introduced by Unisa with the intention of providing efficient and effective tutorial support for

students across the geographic divide to improve the rate of throughput. Despite these efforts, there are continuing challenges of access and participation that prevent an increase in the throughput rate. Tait (2003:3) contends that institutions of higher learning provide student support because “students want it”. According to Tait (2003:3), students opt to study with the institutions that provide access to support that is flexible to their needs. The provision of this type of support is a strategy used to bridge the gap between the students and the institution. A study conducted by Ntuli (2016:1) in the context of Unisa reveals that “most learners who enrol in institutions of higher learning expect that they will receive support that will assist them to succeed in their studies” thereby increasing throughput rate. Therefore, a need exists to evaluate the effectiveness of the ITM programme at Unisa. The researcher believes that evaluating the ITM will provide strategies, which will assist Unisa to overcome the challenges and reach the institutional objectives as expected.

## 1.2 Background to the study

Unisa is a dedicated comprehensive ODL institution. In the past, tutorials were offered solely through the face-to-face mode. Before technology was integrated into the tutorial programme, students were expected to attend tutorials in the regions established by the university with an intention of limiting distance between the university and students. Tutorial sessions were offered mainly on Saturdays and weekdays depending on the tuition plan provided by the tutor and the university.

Unisa subscribes to social justice and fairness; however, this model did not do justice to the majority of students because it reached only a certain percentage of students and did not respond to the flexible character of the institution, which is stated as an institutional value. Brewer, Cinel, Harrison and Mohr (2013:489) support this argument by stating that expecting DL students to attend face-to-face tutorial classes eliminates the main advantage of distance education, namely, flexibility, and defeats one of the mandates of the ODL institutions, which is the removal of barriers and the provision of access to higher education.

According to Unisa's (2015:2) ODL policy:

> "ODL focuses on removing barriers to access learning, flexibility of learning provision, student-centeredness, supporting students and constructing learning programmes with the expectation that students can succeed".

This is in line with Unisa's (2012:1) revised business model, which states that Unisa has been undergoing a rapid transformation in terms of its structures, systems and use of technology to respond to the requirements of a highly diverse student body. Because technology has brought about changes in the way students are supported, Unisa has changed its business model to include the e-aspect, which is inclusive of online support and changes to the tutorial programme.

Literature reveals that the profile of ODL institution students includes "adults who are employed and/or fully occupied with family life and this makes distance education a separate kind of education" (Holmberg, 2005:124). Adding to this, Gumbo (2016a17), citing Lethbridge College (2013), indicates that ODL students possess personal computers and computer skills, prefer their own email addresses, have flexible learning styles, are disciplined, have writing skills and are able to schedule time dedicated to their studies. According to this researcher, such skills assist students to manage their personal responsibilities. As a result, they can interact with the lecturer and ask questions as and when needed because they are independent in their learning.

Unisa believes that DL students entering the university for the first time should be supported academically to increase their participation in their programmes. In 2013, the university implemented the integrated tutor model (ITM) to increase student access and participation. However, this form of support was not built into the course design neither was it part of other student support programmes offered by the university. Instead, it was offered as an "add-on" and not given the attention it deserves.

Unisa (2012:2) indicates that the ITM was developed as one of the important strategies used to support students. A task team, mandated by Senate: Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC), developed the model in consultation with other stakeholders such

as colleges within Unisa. The new model was developed in 2011 and submitted to STLC for approval. When change is implemented in an institution of higher learning, policies and procedures governing the area where change needs to be effected should not be ignored in terms of the tutoring model under study. The design of the new tutor model therefore took into consideration the policies and procedures that relate to curriculum development, assessment, teaching and learning, student support and student success (Unisa, 2012:2).

Distance or contact higher education institutions in developing countries need to produce graduates that possess skills and knowledge to compete in the global economy. The introduction of ICT enables higher education communities to participate in open distance education on a global level. The use of technology in distance education is therefore "beneficial to learners present in any corner of the world" (Namdev, 2012:17).

Globalisation has transformed distance education in a number of ways. Students enrolled in institutions of higher learning therefore need to be equipped with the necessary skills to respond to the changing global economy. To remain relevant in a changing society, countries must commit to delivering higher education opportunities for their students since they will impact on the workforce that they produce. There is a high demand globally for DL emanating from the need for academic qualifications as DL is perceived to be the most convenient way to gain an education without disturbing a job-related schedule. Goswami (2013:79) reveals that higher education is recognised as a vehicle for sustainable development and as a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based society.

Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2012:2) provides a framework for institutions of higher learning in South Africa, including Unisa, which ensures that the country's goals are met in the National Plan. According to DHET (2012:2), there are three major roles played by the universities in the South African context, explained in detail in DHET (2013:27) as:

- To educate and provide people with high-level skills for the labour market, as they are the dominant producers of new knowledge.
- For people to assess and find new applications for existing knowledge, and to validate knowledge and values through their curricula.
- To provide opportunities for social mobility and strengthen social justice and democracy, thus helping to overcome the inequities inherited from the apartheid past.

Unisa is one of the institutions that are mandated to respond to the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (DoE, 2001) for the country and to play the three crucial roles, as set out in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, stated above. Unisa is a comprehensive ODL institution that produces thousands of graduates who participate on a local and global level of the economy (Unisa, 2016b:4).

Peters (2013:184) describes Unisa as the largest university in the country, one of the ten largest distance-teaching universities in the world and as an ODL institution that seeks to provide education to students irrespective of colour, creed, race, gender and disability that has recently added the e-aspect, which denotes its online identity. Unisa (2016b:4) serves students from all walks of life to contribute to knowledge creation and the global economy and is "guided by the principles of learner centeredness, life-long learning and flexibility of learning" (Unisa, 2016b:4).

Institutions of higher learning in South Africa have institutional goals that must be delivered in line with the roles identified in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training. One of the institutional goals, as reflected in the Unisa 2016-2030 strategic objectives, is to harness ICTs to support the transformation of its core business to enable high performance, service and quality delivery to all its communities. This leads to effective teaching, learning and research and an enhanced ODL service to students. To do this, the university revised its tuition policy in 2013 to respond to students' needs for "accessible and affordable learning opportunities to all students regardless of their background" (Unisa, 2013a:1).

It is against this background that Unisa changed the way it delivers teaching and learning support to its students all over the world. For the past 130 years, a distance education model that included “physical printing, warehousing and distribution of materials, physical submission and return of assignments via the post and courier services” was used (Unisa, 2012:1). According to Ntuli (2016:3), most support services, including tutorials, were delivered face-to-face. These included library services, career counselling, work integrated learning, peer collaborative learning, student administration, academic literacies, technology-enhanced learning, student representative bodies, study spaces, telecentres, peer collaborative learning and tutorial support. This study focused on the traditional face-to-face tutorial programme and the online tutorial programme. The section that follows discusses the research problem and questions about the existing conditions and concerns at Unisa on the effectiveness of the ITM in DL as a case study.

## 1.3 Statement of the problem

Tutor support is a strategy employed by some distance education institutions globally. Reputable ODL institutions, such as the Open University of the United Kingdom (OU UK), employ tutors whose main duty is to facilitate learning face-to-face and online. The face-to-face tutor support delivered at regional centres and online is telematics, meaning that information technology is used to transmit education to students in various geographical locations. The aim of this type of support is to decrease the distance between students and their lecturers. Unisa uses the OU UK model to provide tutorial support to its students by taking into consideration its context and student profile. The new tutor support model uses a blended approach to teaching and learning. The term “blended” is defined by Vaughan (2010:165) as a combination of face-to-face and online learning. In addition to this definition, Garnham and Kaleta (2002 cited by Vaughan, 2010:166), add that blended learning takes the best features of the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning and combines them with the best features of online learning to promote active and self-directed learning. Similarly, Bonk and Graham (2006:1) define blended learning as an approach that combines traditional face-to-face

instruction with computer mediated or online instruction. This type of learning provides flexible opportunities to reach a large number of students dispersed globally in a short space of time since the technology assists students to control the pace and location of their learning (Vaughan, 2010:168).

It is important that support should respond to students' needs. Prior to the development of the ITM, Unisa used only face-to-face tutor support for students. This did not respond to students' needs as expected. It is however not clear if ITM reaches all students, or the majority, as intended, or even responds to their support needs. Therefore, the recipients of ITM, i.e., students, should inform and guide the university on whether the new tutor model assists them to learn effectively or not.

## 1.4 Research questions

Users should be the judges of the success of the programme therefore the study explored the following question:

How effective is the ITM in meeting students' needs in teaching and learning at Unisa?

The main research question above translated into the following sub-questions:

- How does the ITM meet Unisa students' needs and expectations?
- What is the quality of the ITM as perceived by these students?
- What is the impact of the implementation of the ITM on student access and participation at Unisa?
- How can the ITM be Africanised to address the learning needs of African students?
- How can the current ITM be improved to fully cater for Unisa students' needs and expectations?

## 1.5 Aims and objectives of the study

The overarching aim of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the use of ITM in meeting Unisa students' teaching and learning needs. In the light of this aim, the objectives of the study were:

- To determine whether the ITM meets Unisa students' learning needs and expectations.
- To examine the quality of the ITM as perceived by Unisa students.
- To analyse the impact of the implementation of the ITM on student access and participation at Unisa.
- To explore ways to Africanise the ITM to address the learning needs of African students.
- To develop improvement strategies for the current ITM to fully cater for Unisa students' learning needs.

## 1.6 Assumptions of the study

The following researcher's assumptions were made in the study:

- All tutors, academic staff members and professional administrative staff members experience challenges in the implementation of the ITM in the areas where they work.
- Despite Unisa's commitment to give support services to students via the ITM, the programme still falls short in responding satisfactorily to students' needs and expectations.

## 1.7 Significance of the study

The ITM was implemented in 2013. Since its inception, there have been a number of challenges attributed to its implementation. This created a need for an inquiry into the ITM. The findings of this study will assist those responsible for the processes and

procedures to strategise and develop alternative ways of ensuring that the model is utilised to benefit the students as intended by Unisa. The recipients of the ITM are students at Unisa who expect to be provided with proper services in terms of tuition for them to succeed. This is important especially when considering that a part of the student population of Unisa has never been exposed to DL, let alone online learning.

As indicated above, students enrolled with Unisa are taking a new journey of transformation from a classroom-based learning environment to an ODL environment. This change has some implications in the tuition related service that they receive through the ITM. Therefore, the findings of this study assist in understanding the dynamics of the students' needs and how they should be tutored effectively via the ITM. The findings also guide policy-makers and designated committees who advise the Management Committee (MANCOM) at Unisa on issues surrounding the ITM-based teaching and learning. The findings help policy-makers to re-examine and re-appraise the current policy for teaching and learning since the development and implementation of the ITM was guided by this policy. These changes lead to improvements in the quality of delivery of the ITM ultimately. The individual managers and education practitioners in the colleges can benefit from these findings, strategies and recommendations since they are the direct users of the ITM. The findings reveal the diverse forms of educational orientations and how they influence the teaching methods and strategies. This study also adds to the corpus of literature about the implementation of ITM in the ODL context.

## 1.8 Overview of research methodology

This study adopted a mixed methods approach to provide a deeper understanding of the research problem. According to Gray (2009:204), mixed methods research entails the process of collecting, analysing and mixing quantitative and qualitative data from single or multiple studies to understand the research problem more completely. Johnson and Christensen (2012:395) indicate that a case study is a research that "provides a detailed account and analysis of one or more cases". An exploratory case

study design was therefore conducted in two phases to collect data from identified Unisa students, tutors and staff members. Qualitative methods were used during the first phase to collect and analyse data from 17 participants consisting of three tutors who were involved in F2F and online tutoring (OL), three Academic Support Coordinators (ASC), two lecturers, two tutorial officers (TOs), two human resource administrators dealing with the tutorial programme, two heads of facilitation of learning (HFLs) and three Regional Academic Coordinators (RACs).

The study followed a purposive sampling technique to select participants for the qualitative phase. This type of selection was chosen because it allowed the researcher to choose individuals who were knowledgeable and had information about ITM and had first-hand experience in the phenomenon being studied. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:69) state that purposive sampling assists researchers to choose those samples that have experience about the phenomenon. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:138) concur that, in purposive sampling, the "researcher selects particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest". This type of selection technique was therefore appropriate for the mixed method that was used in this study.

The qualitative data and findings were then used to develop the survey instrument for the quantitative data collection in the second phase. The survey targeted 2000 participants chosen randomly from the Unisa academic colleges as indicated in Table 5.1. Data for the two phases were analysed separately, firstly the qualitative data, followed by the quantitative data. The findings of the two phases were triangulated during the data analysis.

The target population from which participants were selected offered a deep understanding of the investigated phenomenon and thus triangulated the participants' perspectives in addition to the methods used.

## 1.9 Definition of key terms

### Distance education

Holmberg (2005:9) states that distance education is characterised by teaching and learning being brought about by media, such as printed and written word, audio and video recordings, telephone, computers, TV and radio, for the purpose of communicating the subject and interaction between participants. According to Holmberg (2005:9), in distance education, students and teachers do not meet face-to-face since media takes the place of the teacher.

Peters (1973:206) defines distance education as a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitude which is rationalised by the application of a division of labour and organisational principles as well as by the extensive use of technical media for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct large numbers of students at the same time wherever they live.

These definitions reveal that distance education has a single characteristic which is the absence of physical presence of the teacher and students in the learning process that are replaced by media. This means that, for teaching and learning to take place, there must be a form of communication to impart the subject matter to students wherever they are.

### Distance learning (DL)

Islam and Ferdowsi (2014:176) indicate that DL and distance education are used interchangeably in most literature. As a result, it was not very easy to define DL by itself without touching on some aspects of distance education. Biao (2012:31) defines DL as:

> "a process of education that emphasizes learning. It is an educational enterprise during which a facilitator of learning who is usually separated from the learner by spatial or mental distance, gathers, collates and presents information in a learnable form to one or a group of learners who have accepted the responsibility to learn."

This definition explains the roles and responsibilities of students and tutors/lecturers operating in a DL environment to ensure that learning takes place successfully. O'Rourke (2003:13) concurs with Biao by defining DL as situations where learners are physically separated from the educational provider, communicating in writing (using letter mail, email, fax, or computer conferencing), verbally (by telephone, audio conferencing, video conferencing) or in F2F tutorial sessions.

Baturay and Bay (2009 cited by Gurbuz, 2014:240) concur with the above definitions as they define DL as:

> "the most modern education system which is independent of time and distance, enables individualized education opportunities, and is implemented via information technologies and especially via Internet".

This definition emphasises time, distance and the use of technologies to facilitate learning in DL environments. According to Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (2010:16), DL involves a two-way communication between the student(s) and the lecturer using technology to enable students to study independently.

For DL to take place successfully, dialogue is needed between the participants. Without a dialogue through information technology, students will not benefit from the learning process. It is thus important to note that the emphasis in this definition is on communication and media. Foley (2003:832), on the other hand, defines DL through the following criteria:

- DL is based on a variety of teaching and learning strategies and methods that are activity-based such as simulations, case studies and problem-solving exercises.
- Effective DL materials are experiential; they address the students' life experiences as a point of departure for the learning programme and as a continuous reference throughout the process.
- Quality DL programmes are participatory in that they emphasise the involvement of the learner in all facets of the programme development and delivery.

- Successful DL programmes are interactive and allow for frequent opportunities for participants to engage in a dialogue with subject matter experts and other students.
- Learner support systems are an integral part of any successful DL programme.

These criteria are deemed important for this study as they provide a good understanding of DL in the context of Unisa.

In the light of above definitions, this study defines DL as a learning process in which students learn through participation as they interact with their tutors and peers F2F or through communication technology on a regular basis. The students' participation mostly depends on the communication technology for teaching, guidance and support in their learning journey since they are mostly physically separated from the institution.

**Open distance learning (ODL)**

Shale (2010:105) defines ODL as:

> "a term adopted by institutions for a range of features meant to extend access to educational opportunity to people who would otherwise be excluded. The term was intended to indicate that 'openness' is dependent on much more than just delivering courses at a distance."

ODL, within Unisa's (2008a:2) context, is defined as:

> "a multi-dimensional concept aimed at bridging the time, geographical, economic, social, and educational and communication distance between student and institution, student and academics, student and courseware and student and peers. Open distance learning focuses on removing barriers to access learning, flexibility of learning provision, student-centeredness, supporting students and constructing learning programmes with the expectation that students can succeed."

According to O'Rourke (2003:13), ODL refers to:

> "education and training in which using learning resources, rather than attending

classroom sessions, is the central feature of the learning experience".

Moore and Tait (2002:7) define ODL as:

> "Teaching that is mostly conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner, and that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure."

> "The terms open learning and distance education represent an approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners" (UNESCO, 2002:2).

All the above definitions have a common focus which indicates that ODL involves teaching and learning where students are physically separated from their tutors. Shale (2010:105), Moore and Tait (2002:8) and Unisa (2008) agree that ODL seeks to expand access to higher education and removes barriers that inhibit students from learning. The openness and flexible characteristics of ODL make it possible for students with various backgrounds to learn anywhere and submit their work using various online technologies. These definitions assisted in reviewing literature that is relevant for the study.

This study adopted the definition used by Unisa as it formed the evaluation criterion for the ITM in the Unisa context.

**Integrated Tutor Model (ITM)**

"The integrated tutor model is one of the important tuition support strategies used by Unisa to support students" (Unisa, 2012:2). The ITM means a type of tutoring which is based on face-to-face offerings and e-tutoring systems to support students. Face-to-face tutoring happens at the same location between students and their tutors, while e-tutoring bridges the geographical distance and allows all students to benefit from tutoring (Unisa 2012:14).

This study defines the ITM as a support service that uses F2F and online support to assist students by providing occasional interactions with their tutors to help them (students) to succeed in their studies. This definition was used throughout the study.

**Tutoring**

This is a special type of interaction between a tutor and student, and it can be presented in many forms, e.g. individual and group, distance or F2F lesson, asynchronous and in real-time. The tutor's form of work can involve the individual tutoring consultation (conversation) and group tutoring consultation (Kalimullin & Gabdilkhakov, 2014:184). Berazhny (2014:374) defines tutoring as a "process of joint professional growth whereby students and the tutor learn from each other, develop trust, and contribute to the quality of studies".

Tutoring is the range of activities that provide students with the "face" of the ODL institution, help them find their way through the materials provided, provide facilitation of learning as opposed to lecturing and ensure individual feedback that is not provided in typical ODL materials (Rekkedal, Daweti & Roman, 2006:281).

The first two definitions above put a student and tutor at the centre whereby both parties are expected to participate in the learning process to ensure positive learning outcomes. The last definition puts an emphasis on the range of activities involved in the process of tutoring. All definitions are relevant to the processes of the ITM.

**Interaction**

Xiao (2017:123) indicates that interaction is the reciprocal events that require at least two objects and two actions. In the context of the current study, the implied interaction happens between two or more human actors (e.g. lecturers, other learners) or between the student and non-human agents (e.g. computers). Furthermore, interaction is a dialogue between two or more participants and objects (self, student, lecturer, content and interface) in the technology-mediated DL process (Chou, Peng & Chang, 2010).

There is commonality in the above definitions in the sense that an activity that will be considered interactive in the learning environment is when there is more than one participant or objects and an action that must occur. The absence of these items means that there is no interaction.

**Quality**

Daniel (2005 cited by Mannan, 2009:2) defines quality as an incremental process involving continuous development along with the development of ODL institutions. According to this definition, quality never stops as it is a process that seeks to improve on an ongoing basis. An organisation or institution can never come to a point where it claims to have completed improving its quality in all its activities. Pfeffer and Coote (1991:3) define quality as a product or service that meets the specifications of the customer. This definition shows that quality is about meeting the customer's specific needs and expectations.

Harvey, Green and Burrows (1993:27) assert that quality can be viewed as exceptional, perfection (or consistency), fitness for purpose, value for money and is transformative. Quality, according to this view, is linked to excellence or exceeding standards. This definition puts emphasis on the purpose for which the product or service is designed to achieve as prescribed by the quality standards of the institution or monitoring body. Furthermore, this definition seeks to change and improve the lives of the users for the better.

The implications, according to the first definition by Daniel (2005 cited by Mannan, 2009:2), is that the ITM should strive to improve on a continuous basis and should never stop improving otherwise it will cease to provide quality tutorial services. On the other hand, the definition by Harvey et al. (1993) implies that the ITM should strive to provide the tutorial support services as guided by the institutional objectives, i.e. fitness for purpose, and transform the lives of students at Unisa. The implications of Pfeffer and Coote's definition is that, for the ITM to be described as a quality programme, it should strive to meet the students' needs and expectations.

## Africanisation

Makgoba (1997:199) defines Africanisation as a process of inclusion that stresses the importance of affirming African cultures and identities in a world community. Gumbo (2016a:102) defines Africanisation as a process and a way of life. The implication of these definitions on the study is that the ITM should not be blind to the needs of African students whose lives are immersed in their cultures. This means that the students should be helped to make sense of the ITM in terms of their situations. The ITM should therefore be inclusive and embrace the way African students learn.

## Evaluation

Levine (2005:43) defines evaluation as a process that consists of the merging of three very powerful ideas: the collection of information, comparing of that information against a set of information and the placement of value of that comparison.

This definition shows that evaluation involves three activities, i.e., collection, comparison and drawing a conclusion about the issue under evaluation. During the process of evaluating the ITM, information was collected through various sources, compared with other forms of tutoring models and what Unisa claims to offer through its ITM, and a conclusion was drawn.

According to Vey (2005:viii), evaluation is the making of statements about the quality or value of assessment tasks. It is used in assessment in terms of looking at a broad range of evidence to encourage students and assessors to reflect on the process of learning, as well as the product of that process. It is an on-going process of measuring progress against expected learning outcomes at particular stages. Vey puts an emphasis on the quality of the product under evaluation taking into consideration the information collected as evidence through the data collection process.

Evaluation entails using determined criteria and standards to assess the value of systematically acquired information regarding accuracy, effectiveness, economic efficiency, or satisfactory outcomes, either quantitatively or qualitatively. Evaluations

provide relevant feedback to stakeholders (Bloom, 1956 cited in Bloom, Hastings & Madaus, 1971; Levine, 2005; Trochim, 2006). Based on this definition, for evaluation to occur, pre-determined criteria and standards to evaluate the ITM under study were set to assess the information gathered using mixed methods regarding the effectiveness of this tutoring model used at Unisa.

This study defined evaluation as a process of collecting information on the effectiveness of the ITM using pre-determined criteria and standards, analysing and interpreting it against the set determined by Unisa, and against other models, to improve the ITM's effectiveness to service students who use this programme.

## 1.10 Structure of the thesis

### Chapter One

Chapter One provides an introduction and background of the study and informs the reader what the study entails. The research question, problem and purpose of the study are introduced.

### Chapter Two

The chapter outlines the theoretical framework which frames the study. The study is based on social constructivism, connectivism, Salmon's five stages of e-Learning and empathy theories. Criticism, implications and application of these theories are discussed in detail in this chapter.

### Chapters Three and Four

Chapters Three and Four review the relevant scholarly literature, including pertinent concepts used in the study to provide a comprehensive picture of the ITM, e.g., DL, ODL, tutoring, interaction, Africanisation, quality and evaluation.

### Chapter Five

Chapter Five accounts for the methods of data collection under the chosen paradigm and research design, data collection and analysis processes. The development of the

research instruments, sampling techniques and the pilot study also receive attention.

**Chapter Six**

Chapter Six presents and analyses data that were collected qualitatively in relation to the research questions and the reviewed literature. The goal of the chapter is primarily to construct the experiences of the participants and users of the ITM at Unisa.

**Chapter Seven**

Chapter Seven presents and analyses the quantitative data that were collected in relation to the research questions and the reviewed literature. Furthermore, the chapter triangulates the findings from both qualitative and quantitative data collected and discusses the findings.

**Chapter Eight**

Chapter Eight concludes the study by providing the summary, suggests strategies for the improvement of the ITM, and makes recommendations.

## 1.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher introduced the study by focusing on the importance of providing student support in DL with special reference to tutor support which is the cornerstone of this study. The type of tutor support which was provided never met the students' needs and as a result, Unisa saw it fit to use technology to expand access, participation and throughput rate. Hence the background of the study which put an emphasis on the integration of f2f and online tutor support to provide flexible learning to students at Unisa was discussed in detail. The aims and objectives that informed and guided the study, its significance, an overview of the research methodology and the definition of key terms. The chapter that follows discusses the theory that guides the study.

# CHAPTER TWO
# THE THEORY GUIDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTEGRATED TUTOR MODEL

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the role played by theory in promoting the effectiveness of the ITM in a DLE. It unfolds by defining the concept of theory as perceived by different scholars. There are numerous theories used to guide research, however, this study identified four theories that play an essential role in guiding tutor support in distance learning (DL), namely, the social constructivist theory of learning which is the primary theoretical framework for this study, the connectivist theory, the empathy theory and Salmon's five stages of e-learning model of learning as theories supporting social constructivism. These theories were selected because they are considered to be relevant for explaining a phenomenon of inquiry in the field of DL tutoring support. They are broad, encompass other theories of learning and are commonly used in distance education (Lebeloane, 1998:69; Holmberg 2007:429). Each theory covers the following aspects:

- Definition of a theory;
- Characteristic of a theory;
- Criticism of a theory;
- Implications of a theory to the study; and
- Application of a theory to the study.

This chapter begins by defining theory and its purpose for the study. Each theory has its own distinguishing characteristics or features which form part of the discussion. The criticism and implications of each of the above theories are attended to. The chapter also explains the relevance of each theory for the evaluation of the integrated tutor model (ITM) at Unisa and, most importantly, how each theory is applied. These discussions are contextualised within the scholarly work relevant for this study.

## 2.2 Defining the term theory

Kerlinger (1964:11) and Klett (2012:7) define theory as a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view or model of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena. In support of this definition, Leedy and Ormrod (2005:4) postulate that “a theory is an organised body of concepts and principles intended to explain a particular phenomenon”. Thus, theories explain how and why something functions the way it does (Johnson & Christensen, 2007:7). Furthermore, Holmberg (2007:430) defines theory as a unit of knowledge that comprises facts, assumptions and hypotheses. According to this researcher, scientific theory must be consistent with the facts, otherwise it is mere fiction.

From the above definitions, it could be said that theories provide a structured set of lenses through which aspects or parts of the world can be understood, studied or analysed. This means that, when using a theory, a researcher needs to follow a process to formulate and organise ideas systematically with a purpose of understanding a particular phenomenon. The discussion that follows focuses on social constructivism as one of the theories that guided this study.

## 2.3 Social constructivism

### 2.3.1 Defining social constructivism

Social constructivism is defined as a philosophical approach, which holds that knowledge is constructed through a social interaction within a group of people who are in pursuit of a common goal (Vygotsky, 1978:57). According to this theory, learning happens when students come together within a social context and engage on various levels, i.e., with each other as peers, with the content and with tutors. This theory constitutes different characteristics as described below.

### 2.3.2 Characteristics of social constructivist theory

#### 2.3.2.1 Learning is a social phenomenon

As defined above, the first distinguishing characteristic of social constructivism is that it is a social phenomenon whereby learning takes place through social interaction. Vygotsky (1978:57) indicates that:

> "[e]very function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals."

This means that, before knowledge is constructed at an individual level, it is first constructed at a social level through interaction with other students. According to Vygotsky, there is power in interaction. This view is supported by Ernest (2010:43) who indicates that "human beings are formed through their interactions with each other as well as by their individual processes". Beck and Kosnik (2006:7), in support of this view, believe that social constructivism "encourages members of a learning community to present their ideas strongly while remaining open to the ideas of others". According to these authorities, this approach involves the whole person, thought, motion and action. Furthermore, Anderson and Dron (2011:84) argue that this approach acknowledges the "social nature and … its creation in the minds of individuals". Amineh and Asl (2015:13) posit that reality does not exist in advance, instead, it is constructed through human activity. According to them, understanding, significance and meaning are developed in coordination with other human beings and, without human beings coming together, it is virtually impossible to discover knowledge. Consequently, social invention is necessary. Almala (2006:33) emphasises the collaborative nature of social constructivism, which declares that knowledge is acquired through collaboration with meaning negotiated from multiple perspectives. Collaboration provides opportunities for students to become aware of different ways of thinking and understanding.

Considering the views of the theorists discussed above, tutors do not just transmit knowledge to students who receive it passively. The role of a tutor has changed to be that of a guide who guides the learning process while students create knowledge through interaction and integrate it with existing knowledge. Hence, Creswell (2003:8) suggests that, in a socially constructed setting, meaning is typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons and is also informed by experiences (Driscoll, 2000:376; Beck & Kosnik, 2006:10).

When tutors engage students using the constructivist theory of learning, it is important for them to establish what students know about the topic presented to them. In this way, the tutor ignites what students know and they are given a chance to construct their own knowledge based on their prior knowledge and experiences. These activities promote a sense of ownership in the learning process (McMahon, 1997:2; Amineh & Asl, 2015:10). Tutors should therefore support students by creating spaces of engagement F2F and online where new topics are introduced. In these spaces, students are given an opportunity to engage with the topic and provide their views using their prior knowledge and experiences.

Hoover (1996:2) asserts that learning is an active process in which learners negotiate their understanding in the light of what they experience in the new learning situation. This is supported by Cook (1992:11), who advocates that a social constructivist theory provides a chance to negotiate meaning for the curriculum. According to this researcher, when students negotiate meaning, they ask questions, and try to find answers themselves. As a result, what they learn becomes more meaningful to them.

Ultimately, students will have a sense of ownership and commitment to their learning journey. Fung (2000:162) notes that, in a social constructivist approach tutorial session, tutors pose questions to students, which elicit answers and lead them to explore through activities. A tutorial should include a substantial number of student-centred activities which involve considerable types of interactions – individual work, pair work, group discussion, group experiment and student reporting. This suggests that, through these activities, experiences will be shared and linked to the new knowledge under

discussion.

#### 2.3.2.2 Learning is based on experience

An important aspect of social constructivism is that learning is built from knowledge that students already possess about the world. This means that previous knowledge and experiences are used to construct new ideas and new knowledge in a tutorial class to understand the world or new concepts about the topic at hand. This claim supports Schunk (1996:239) who states that students learn by making sense of their environments and construct reality based on their capabilities at the present time. Beck and Kosnik (2006:12) argue that the knowledge of the tutor is important for teaching and learning. However, the knowledge brought by students into the learning environment is essential as it helps with the construction of reality. Furthermore, Driscoll (2000:376) suggests that this theory rests on the assumption that knowledge is constructed by students as they attempt to make sense of their experiences as most learning occurs in a social context in which the members of a group negotiate individual actions and understandings. For example, in a tutorial class be it online or in a F2F setting, a tutor could introduce a topic or a scenario and ask questions that would provide opportunities for students to engage with each other as peers and answer questions. This could occur synchronously or asynchronously. If the facilitation is done asynchronously, this will provide students with an opportunity to reflect before they engage with the topic.

#### 2.3.2.3 Learning is an active process of constructing knowledge

Research has demonstrated that engaging students in the learning process increases their attention and focus, motivates them to practice higher-level critical thinking skills and promotes meaningful learning experiences (McCullough & Munro, 2018:72). Conversely, the traditional way of tutoring has created a culture of passive students who expect to be “spoon-fed”. The researcher’s observation during tutorial classes is that some students tend to depend on tutors for learning and make little effort to solve problems. Consequently, this culture creates a one-way communication in a teaching and learning environment (Watson, 2006:141) as the teacher dominates the teaching

itself. The changing face of teaching and learning calls for active learning on the part of the students, thus calling for the role of the tutor to become a facilitator, expert and guide (Cattaneo, 2017:146). This change, according to Amineh and Asl (2015:14), requires a set of skills to fit into this new role. These skills include providing students with opportunities to test the adequacy of their current understanding, learning environments that will assist students to engage on the new topic based on their prior knowledge and experience, sufficient time for them to build the new knowledge actively, students' motivation, their critical thinking and to encourage independent learning (Amineh & Asl, 2015:12; Higgs, 2016b:96).

The approach to learning in a social constructivist epistemology is student-centred in nature whereby learning is a centre of all activity while students take control of the learning process and a tutor becomes a guide, facilitator and expert rather than an instructor. This suggests that both students and tutors benefit in the learning process in that both are always provided with the opportunities within the classroom environment to create new ways of thinking and problem solving. Social constructivism places a strong emphasis on problem solving and constructing new ways of thinking and encourages collaboration. Consequently, DL should produce autonomous students who are able to learn independently. Amineh and Asl (2015:15) note that social constructivism produces such students since the facilitator provides support, helps students and gradually decreases support as students take control of their learning. This suggests that social constructivism as a theory gives students opportunities to practice the 21$^{st}$ century skills in communication, knowledge sharing, critical thinking and use of relevant technologies found in institutions of higher learning as well as in the workplace.

### 2.3.3 Criticism of social constructivist theory

Merrill (1997 cited by McMahon, 1997:6) indicates that:

> "one of the most tangible criticisms of social constructivism is the type of learning it supports. While it may be true that social negotiation is a useful approach to

> achieving consensual understanding of ill-structured subject matter, even in the 'softest' subjects there is often a body of undisputed knowledge. Constructivist strategies are often not efficient, resulting in ‘a trial-and-error approach to the performance in the real world’".

Another limitation of this theory is the fact that, while students learn from one another, there might be a loss of control from the tutor, and teaching time may be limited resulting in a possible reduction in the content covered, and student resistance to new methods of teaching and learning (Huxham, 2005:19).

This study closes the gap that exists in the body of knowledge with reference to Unisa’s tutorial classes conducted online and F2F – a model that attempts to eliminate a trial-and-error approach to the Unisa tutoring system. Additionally, the study proposes strategies that can increase interaction among students and ensure that there is a balance of activities performed by students alone and those that are performed by the tutor. The recommended strategies can ensure that a tutorial is planned in such a way that it covers the content and finds ways to assist students to welcome new teaching methods in an ODL environment.

According to the researcher’s observation in the management of tutorial classes at Unisa, students may resist active learning activities due to the fact that they are comfortable with the traditional way of learning. Students may be convinced that new ways of learning require them to spend time learning the new approaches, techniques or even acquiring knowledge on how to use the available technology. It is the researcher’s opinion that they think that new technologies require too much effort. Very few students regard new approaches as adding value to their learning journey.

### 2.3.4 Implications of the theory to the study

#### 2.3.4.1 Implications for the tutor

Vygotsky’s framework for tutoring using ITM implies that new opportunities need to be established for students to learn through social interactions with others – the tutor and

peers – in constructing knowledge and understanding. This will need tutors to encourage students to build on prior knowledge, think critically, reflect, and present their information independently and in small groups to promote teamwork. Furthermore, tutors should consider the knowledge and experiences students bring to class and not only to the knowledge that the tutor brings. Tutors can take advantage of the framework to support collaborative work in students to construct knowledge.

Social constructivist theory could be conceptualised from an African perspective as it promotes a working togetherness in the spirit of unity. When students work together, they share information and learn from one another, an important characteristic for African communities where children are taught to share from an early age. In this light, African indigenous knowledge puts an emphasis on the concept of Ubuntu which requires people to work together towards attaining a particular goal, in this case, to create knowledge together. Mudimbe (1988:4) supports this view by indicating that "to be is necessarily to be in relation to others". According to this researcher, human beings need to be highly dependent on each other because, in the African ethos and practical life, this connection with others is essential (Assie-Lumumba, 2016:23) as it promotes unity in the learning spaces. The implication for ITM is that tutors have a task to encourage students' interaction, create social platforms where individuals and groups of different backgrounds and cultures can openly communicate, engage and share their knowledge. Such a practice is not only good for human interaction but also for their learning journey. Thus, the African culture has always embraced social interaction as a form of educating the young, showing respect and sharing.

The researcher believes that working togetherness is linked to the motivation of students to engage in the learning process. Ntuli (2016:20) indicates that one of the strategic support programmes put in place to increase motivation in DL among students is a tutorial programme. According to Ntuli (2016:20), motivation can be used to assist students studying within DL to deal with isolation in this environment and may even discourage dropout, particularly for students who have not been exposed to DL or online learning before. This suggests that the role of a tutor in motivating students to

engage in a learning environment can also lead to peer motivation. This implies that, if individuals are motivated, this could lead them to motivate one another to engage with their tasks in the learning environment and construct meaning and knowledge (Croft, Dalton & Grant, 2010:32). The aspect of motivation fits well with the theory of social constructivism as it promotes engagement in teaching and learning.

#### 2.3.4.2 Implications for the student

As already mentioned in the foregoing discussion, students are expected to actively participate in their own education. Active participation assists students to own the learning process. Literature highlights the fact that if students participate actively in their learning, they take full responsibility for their own destiny.

When tutors facilitate and introduce a new topic to students, students should accommodate and assimilate new information into their current understanding. This means that students need to control their own learning process and reflect on their experiences. Ally (2008:17) notes that, when learning online, students should be given the opportunity to reflect on what they are learning, collaborate with other students and check their own progress. There is therefore no doubt that, according to the social constructivist theory of learning, knowledge is communally-based and students deserve access to knowledge of different communities, hence communities of learning cannot be divorced from DLE. Students need to complement and learn from one another.

### 2.3.5 Application of social constructivist theory of learning in ITM

There are number of strategies in which this theory could be applied in the learning environment. ITM integrates F2F and online teaching and learning in DL contexts across boundaries. Social constructivism theory forms a base and a pillar for this type of learning since it allows students to learn together collaboratively across cultures. Students can learn as a group across cultures and boundaries to create an understanding of the subject content. Students need to learn collaboratively by developing teamwork skills that would assist them to understand that the success of a

team is essentially the success of an individual and that these two are related. For students to learn together, the tutor should assume a role that would encourage teamwork among them.

The role of a tutor changes in social constructivism. The social constructivist principle implies that tutors using the ITM should create conducive environments and platforms that would encourage group learning where students will participate actively in their learning and assist students to create their own knowledge that will lead to independent learning. This suggests that when students learn as a team, a sense of independence, self-awareness and self-directedness is created in the learning process. The researcher's view is that if students are self-directed and independent in their learning, learning occurs with less stress because they share a common goal and they can depend on each other without expecting the tutor to spoon-feed them.

Social constructivism enhances the meaning of the existing knowledge and the creation of the new. Because all cognitive functions are believed to originate in, and are explained as products of social interactions, students in DL come to the F2F and online learning (OL) environments with a certain level of understanding of subject content. As students interact with each other as peers and with the tutor, new knowledge is constructed, and the existing knowledge is enhanced. Learning is more than the assimilation of new knowledge; it is the process by which students can be integrated into a knowledge community. The implication of social constructivism in this area means that learning communities need to be created for reaching a common goal, i.e., success. Wenger (1998:1) refers to these communities as social learning systems which involve a dual process of meaning making on one hand and, on the other hand, building learning communities that engage directly in activities, conversations, reflections, and other forms of personal participation. When students learn within a learning community, certain skills essential for online students are built. These include social learning, dialogical, self and group evaluation and reflection skills. Social learning skills are needed to support decision-making, communication, trust building and conflict management in a learning environment. Dabbagh (2007:221) explains:

> "Dialogical skills include the ability to discuss issues, share and debate ideas, negotiate meaning, demonstrate openness to multiple perspectives, and possess good articulation and listening skills. Self and group evaluation skills include learning how to be individually accountable for, being active and engaged in group activity, doing a fair share of the work and helping other group members to demonstrate competence and learning achievement. Reflection skills include the ability to apply frequent and substantive consideration and assessment of one's own learning process and products and the group's learning process and products."

It is clear that, in social constructivism, students should be prepared to acquire certain skills that would be of help to them as they continue to learn. It is on this basis that the Unisa tutor model subscribes to social constructivist learning theory (Unisa, 2012:2) that learning is:

> "a result of several situated and dynamic connections between students and the curriculum, the resources which support the curriculum, lecturers and tutors, administrative and professional support functions offered by the institution, students' peers who are also studying for the same degrees, other peers, community members and broader society" (Unisa, 2012:3).

This theory is relevant for this study because it shows how various forms of interaction happen between Unisa tutors and students, and among students. Furthermore, the theory shows how students interact with each other to ensure that effective learning takes place. These interactions can happen F2F and through OL.

For these interactions to happen in OL, there is a need to embrace all ICT competencies in the teaching and learning environment to prepare students for their career paths and assist them to be competent as 21st century students. Good as it may be, social constructivism alone is insufficient as a theory to inform the effective implementation and evaluation of ITM in DL. To ensure that justice is done in the evaluation of the ITM, the connectivism theory of learning, which is considered to be a theory of the digital age, was identified for online learning within the Unisa space. The theory of connectivism is best suited for this study as it provides the lens through which

the effectiveness of the ITM at Unisa can be evaluated. Connectivism theory for e-learning is discussed next.

## 2.4 Connectivism theory of learning

### 2.4.1 Defining connectivist theory of learning

Literature defines connectivist theory as a theory of learning in a digital age (Siemens, 2004:1; Kop & Hill, 2008:1; Bell, 2011:3). Connectivism explains how internet technologies have created new opportunities for people to learn and share information across the World Wide Web and among themselves. These technologies include Web browsers, email, wikis, online discussion forums, social networks, YouTube, and any other tool which enables the users to learn and share information with other people (Siemens, 2005:3).

### 2.4.2 Characteristics of connectivist theory

The characteristics of this theory are defined in terms of the principles that guide it as it applies in teaching and learning spaces. Siemens (2004:2) describes the following set of principles of connectivism:

- Learning and knowledge relies on shared information;
- Learning is a process of connecting specialised nodes of information sources;
- Learning may take place through tools;
- Exposure to more information is more critical than what is currently known;
- Nurturing and maintaining sharing of information is needed to facilitate lifelong learning;
- Ability to synthesise information is a core skill; and
- Updated knowledge is the intent of all connectivist learning practices.

The principles listed above mean that learning is no longer an individual effort that is

confined to the four walls of a physical classroom. Rather, learning and knowledge acquisition is a continuous process which takes place in a communal space where individuals who share the same goal and objective meet to achieve their learning goals. When knowledge is constructed by a group of students, it is not limited by space, time and location, but digital spaces (non-human) make it possible for students to meet online, share views and co-create knowledge. Hence, Bell (2009:15) emphasises the fact that connectivism characterises knowledge as a flow through a network of humans and non-humans. According to the constructivist theory of learning, students should be in a position to interact with non-human nodes, i.e. computers, to create knowledge and understand the subject matter. Siemens (2005:2) suggests that connectivism provides insights into the learning skills and tasks needed for students to flourish in a digital era. Bell (2011:4) supports Siemens' suggestion by indicating that the principles of connectivism stress learning as a distribution of information and knowledge across networks of people that promotes active participation in the learning environment.

The above characteristics or principles reveal the strength of this theory. However, literature also indicates gaps in connectivism as a theory of online learning. The criticism of this theory is presented subsequently.

### 2.4.3 Criticism of the connectivist theory

According to Bell (2011:4), connectivism has been criticised as a learning theory that claims to replace its antecedents, namely, cognitive, behaviourist and constructive theories of learning. On the other hand, Bell (2011:11) refers to Siemens (2004) who indicates that he found that these theories have a limitation in terms of the intrapersonal view of learning; fail to address learning that is located within technology and organisations; and lack a contribution to the value judgments that need to be made in knowledge-rich environments. Siemens (2006:1) acknowledges the fact that organisational structures are not conducive to the current characteristics and context of knowledge, which he asserts have changed to assist with the implementation of the theory. He therefore proposes that organisations should be prepared to change their structures and spaces to accommodate the use of technology for teaching and learning.

This study therefore responds to the criticisms by showing the integration of connectivism with the antecedent theories of learning, mainly the social constructivist theory of learning. The study also proposes organisational structures and strategies that would be convenient for learning in a digital age through the ITM.

### 2.4.4 Implications of the theory to the study

#### 2.4.4.1 Implications for tutors

In the context of ITM, connectivism affords both students and tutors an opportunity to interact outside of the physical classroom and connect through the internet. According to Bell (2009:10), educators in the higher education space, including tutors, should be willing to be critical experimenters of new tools and services in their exposure to them.

#### 2.4.4.2 Implications for students

In the digital age, students are expected to be competent in the skills required to engage in a digital platform. Failure to have these skills can pose serious challenges in their learning journey. Students are expected to navigate digital platforms, find information, and engage with other students, tutors and the content itself. This could be done through a number of social network platforms found on the net such as blogs, e-mails, YouTube, wiki-spaces, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook etc. Lecturers and tutors should also take advantage of these platforms as they contribute tremendously towards student learning.

#### 2.4.4.3 Implications for institutions

Connectivism also implies that the institution should create the systems that can support and encourage users to engage with or without limited barriers and make learning a meaningful experience. Another implication for the institutions is that they should invest in the training and development of staff, i.e., lecturers and tutors who are expected to use the systems to facilitate learning in the digital age. The institution should take advantage of systems that students already use and are familiar with and use them for

teaching and learning.

### 2.4.5 Applications of the connectivist theory of learning

The application of connectivist theory of learning is closely linked to Salmon's five stages of e-learning model which guides online learning. In the context of this study, tutors have an important role to play in the application of this theory because they give direction to the students online. For learning to be successful, tutors should provide access to online classroom and motivate students for the course. This, according to Salmon, Nie and Edirisingha (2010:170), is the essential prerequisite for effective participation. Tutors prepare the platform for students by posting messages online, welcoming new students and even asking them to create their own profiles and post them online. In this way, they introduce themselves to the learning community, create ground rules for their learning journey and socialise for learning purposes. Students are then expected to create knowledge as a team, work together more effectively and engage in a social construction of knowledge. As they do this, students develop and can reflect on what they have learnt and whether learning objectives and goals were achieved as planned.

## 2.5 Empathy theory of learning

### 2.5.1 Defining empathy theory

Holmberg (2005:38) defines empathy theory as a theory that is used in DE and referred to as guided didactic conversation that adopts a conversational style to teaching and learning. Wilson et al. (1999:12) conceptualise empathy as "an emotional reaction in a particular situation". They also identify empathy as "a trait or a more stable personality characteristic" and as "measured trait empathy". Felt (2011:4) indicates that empathy should be understood as the product of a multi-dimensional, dynamic process whose expression from moment to moment and/or across domains is contingent upon contextual factors. According to this researcher, empathy consists of emotional and cognitive aspects. The emotional aspect refers to the hedonic phenomenon of

experiencing emotion because it is co-felt by another, e.g., “feeling with” or “feeling for.” The cognitive component refers to thought processes such as perceiving others correctly (Felt, 2011:6). Contemporary scholars, such as Hoffman (2000:4), embrace emotional and cognitive components within the single term, “empathy”. Empathy is the recommended guiding principle for DE because it influences all the activities involved, such as course development, counselling, student-tutor interaction and administration, among others. It can also be applied in all contacts between students, tutors and counsellors, etc. (Holmberg, 2003:42).

### 2.5.2 Characteristics of empathy theory

The characteristics of empathy theory include feelings of empathy and belonging that promote students’ motivation to learn and influence the learning process (Holmberg, 2004:82). These characteristics include the creation of friendly, mediated interactions between students, tutors, counsellors and other staff in the supporting organisation, as well as liberal organisational-administrative structures and processes. According to Holmberg (2004:82), the role of empathy inherent in this theory of teaching-learning conversations has generated four hypotheses, which claim that:

- the stronger the conversational characteristics, the stronger the students’ feelings of personal relationship to the supporting organisation;
- the stronger the students’ feelings that the supporting organisation is interested in making the learning matter personally relevant to them, the greater their personal involvement;
- the stronger the students’ feelings of personal relationship to the supporting organisation and of being personally involved with the learning matter, the stronger the motivation and the more effective the learning; and
- the more independent and academically experienced the students are, the less relevant the conversational characteristics become.

The above hypotheses show the importance of conversation in the learning

environment as the basis of relationship building in the learning journey of the student and the university. This, in turn, shows that the university is interested in making the content personally relevant to the students. When students identify with the content, they become motivated, active and involved in their learning. This involvement can narrow the gap between the institution and students which can, in turn, result in effective learning. If learning is effective, the students will be able to develop independent skills to deal with challenges encountered on their academic journey. Holmberg (2003:38) shows that the empathy approach to teaching and learning is attractive to students, supports study motivation and facilitates learning. In support of this, Felt (2011:26) indicates that empathy in DE increases motivation to process others' situations. For example, empathy helps to observe students' feelings and reflect upon their perspective by humanising the other and demonstrating the positive impact of such processing upon behavioural outcomes.

Baath (1980 cited by Holmberg, 2004:83) indicates that another hypothesis related to the third part of the empathy theory is the frequent communication opportunities that favour learning. These communication opportunities form the basis of successful interactions between students and between tutors and students either F2F or online. Enhanced communication is crucial in the implementation of ITM and its evaluation particularly in DL since tutors facilitate the learning of a diverse student population comprising different ages, cultural backgrounds and levels of understanding. Empathy in such environments will motivate students to continue with their studies and not drop out.

### 2.5.3 Criticism of the empathy theory

Positive contributions rather than limitations are documented in the literature concerning this theory. Moore, Holmberg, Peters and Bernath (2007:450) are of the view that there is a range of degrees of empathy in teaching programmes and that some students require more empathy than others. In support of this view, the researcher believes that empathy may be detrimental to students who do not need it because they may take advantage of empathy and abuse the system, for instance, by giving excuses for not

submitting assignments or participating in an online tutorial.

### 2.5.4 Implications of the empathy theory

This theory requires not only the quick turnaround time of assignments, but helpful conversational comments and suggestions on each assignment submitted. Holmberg (2007:432) indicates that empathy requires the university to ensure a suitable frequency of assignments or project submissions and the constant availability of tutors and advisers online and F2F. In the context of Unisa DL, my view of the empathy approach is that tutors need to understand various situations faced by students as they study in DL, most particularly in online courses, as some students are not technologically competent. In the case of F2F tutorials, tutors need to be mindful of the distances travelled by students to the university and ensure that they create a friendly atmosphere, provide support in tutorial classes and encourage all students to participate in the learning process. Holmberg (2007:432) states that a friendly atmosphere, helpful suggestions and encouragement support study motivation and facilitate success.

Holmberg (2001:74) notes that, if an empathetic approach is fostered in DL, the outcomes of the study will be improved and students will be motivated to learn. The theory implies that the creation of empathy in F2F teaching also applies to DE, provided that students are engaged in decision-making, that the style of presentation is lucid, problem-oriented and conversation-like, that friendly non-contiguous interaction between students and tutors is maintained and that liberal organisational-administrative structures and processes are created (Holmberg, 2007:433).

### 2.5.5 Application of empathy theory in ITM

The empathy theory could be applied in online and F2F environments to ensure a friendly atmosphere in the interactions between students and tutors. The main purpose of interaction is to help and teach students by explaining concepts and providing examples, etc. Empathy between those who teach and those who learn is universally a good basis for learning as it is easily understandable, conversation-like, friendly, helps

students to learn, motivates students and prevents them from dropping out (Holmberg, 2001:71).

## 2.6 Salmon's five stages of e-learning model

### 2.6.1. Defining Salmon's five stage of e-learning model

Salmon's framework is defined as a process-based online teaching and learning model designed to demonstrate student participation in online learning and the role of the e-moderator or online facilitator. Figure below presents the five-stage approach of "Model of Teaching and Learning Online" that is easily understood and employed by e-facilitators within higher education (Moule, 2007:37). According to Salmon et al. (2010:169), the framework was also designed for enabling and scaffolding remote groups to work and learn together using asynchronous bulletin boards. The model has informed online learning and development practices across different levels of online and blended learning. It describes how to motivate online participants to build learning through online tasks or activities referred to as "e-tivities" by Salmon, and to pace online students through stages of training and development (Mayes & De Freitas, 2004:36). This means that the model was not designed solely for e-learning but also for blended learning environments, which makes it suitable for the ITM study. Moule (2007:38) suggests that this framework is designed to support a constructivist approach to learning and links to the social constructivist approach to teaching and learning as discussed earlier in this chapter.

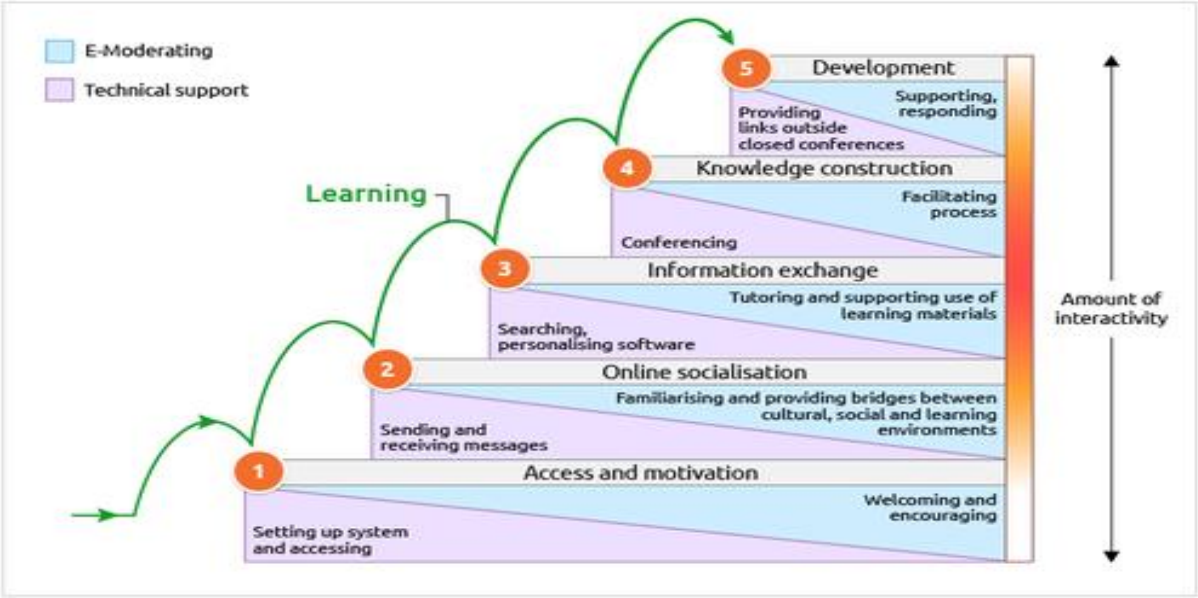


**Figure 2.1: Salmon's Five-Stage E-Learning Model**

(Source: www.gillysalmon.com/five-stage-model.html)

### 2.6.2 Characteristic of Salmon's pedagogical framework

The characteristics of Salmon's pedagogical framework could be explained from the five stages that constitute this model of teaching and learning as shown in Figure 2.1. These stages are access and motivation, online socialisation, information exchange, knowledge construction and development. Each stage is discussed below.

**Stage 1: Access and motivation**

Access to appropriate ICT hardware, software and network connections is required to support e-learning but is often problematic for learners (Moule, 2007:37). Salmon et al. (2010:170) note that the first stage of access and motivation includes students' essential prerequisites for effective participation and the ability to benefit from remote group work for learning. This requires tutors to induct students into the online learning environment (Mayes & De Freitas, 2004:36) and provide help to participants who need technical support to facilitate access to the Learning Management System (LMS).

**Stage 2: Online socialisation**

This is a stage where students are expected to establish a personal online identity and find other students to interact with. Salmon et al. (2010:177) opine that this stage involves understanding the nature of online environment and how it is used for learning, and developing trust and mutual respect to work together on common tasks. During this stage, each student introduces himself/herself to the group as guided by the tutor. Some students navigate through the system to perform some of the e-tivities prepared by the tutor.

According to Salmon et al. (2010:177), online socialisation stands for more than merely "socialising". It includes understanding how being online contributes to learning for the topic, the course and the learning group. This suggests that students are expected to learn during socialisation and not just socialise without learning anything pertaining to the course. It is at this stage that ground rules are established by students together with their tutor, where the tutor provides direction in terms of the goals that need to be achieved in the course and where the tutor and students share information about their backgrounds, interests and experiences.

**Stage 3: Information exchange**

This is a stage where students give and receive relevant and useful information about the course and undertake course-related learning tasks. Up to and including stage 3, a form of co-operation occurs through students' support for each person's goals. This stage comprises sharing and recommending information to others and helping them to achieve their goals. According to Salmon et al. (2010:179), the conversation pattern in online platforms is similar to that which occurs in F2F tutorials.

**Stage 4: Knowledge construction**

During stage 4, more complex constructive tasks are possible, discussions occur and the interactions become more collaborative. Furthermore, students begin to trust each other and actively seek each other out for assistance and input. Rather than merely

competing against each other, they now complement and help each other to work as a team towards a common goal and engage in a social construction of knowledge.

**Stage 5: Development**

During this stage, students reflect on what they have learnt and whether objectives, goals and personal development were achieved. The researcher strongly believes that, at this stage, students are more goal oriented, they understand why they engage in various activities and reach a level of maturity.

### 2.6.3 Criticism of the framework

Critics of this framework believe that the five-stage approach to e-learning has provided a coherent model upon which to base online learning design in higher education. However, there are concerns that the model is becoming a dominant discourse as it is adapted to become a template for the design of all online teaching and learning, to the exclusion of other ideas (Salmon et al., 2010:169). Its principle purpose is to provide a model for e-tutors to support student engagement and learning online by employing the constructivist pedagogic theory. Consequently, it is limited because the variety of e-learning approaches available for use within computer-mediated communication is neglected and the range of learning theories available is ignored (Salmon, 2003 cited in Salmon et al., 2010:39).

The five-stage model does not reflect the potential of e-learning as part of an integrated approach that includes F2F delivery (Moule, 2007:39) even though Salmon et al. (2010:169) are convinced that this model could be used in blended approaches to teaching and learning. Drawing from the study that was conducted prior to the development of this theory, the researcher observed that Jones and Peachey (2005) implemented this framework for F2F mode of teaching and learning. Jones and Peachey's (2005) only critique lies in the socialisation stage where they are unable to determine whether an "appropriate" level of socialisation was achieved as little guidance is offered that allows such a measurement. This is perceived as a gap in research and

this study therefore demonstrates how socialisation can be achieved in F2F tutorial classes.

The blended approach to teaching and learning, applying the social constructivist approach, provides another perspective. The literature reveals that this model dominates discourse in learning technologies as it is seen as a template for the design of all online teaching and learning environments regardless of the context. In response to this criticism, the study ensures that the South African context, with its technological infrastructure, is taken into consideration.

### 2.6.4 Implications of the five-stage model of e-learning for ITM

The implications of the five-stage model of learning for ITM are that, during the first stage of ITM implementation, i.e. the access and motivation stage, students are expected to set up the system and access the Learning Management System (LMS) while the tutor welcomes, encourages and gives them information on where to find technical support if they are struggling with access issues. This stage can benefit students who may not have access to online facilities so that they can be provided with access and gain computer skills at the university or telecentres distributed across the country.

During stage two, students are expected to actively engage in communication by sending and receiving messages online and interact with each other. Tutors establish ground rules, called “netiquette” (network etiquette) and encourage introductions through ice-breakers to manage student behaviour and language used online. Empathy plays a critical role during stages one and two, as the tutor guides the students on how to access the online classroom and refers them to relevant departments to assist them to develop their digital literacy skills.

In stage the of information exchange, students carry out activities by working online, reporting and discussing the findings of tasks assigned to them while the tutor facilitates structured activities, assigns roles and responsibilities, supports use of learning

materials, encourages discussions and summarises the findings and/or outcomes. It is at this stage that students are empowered to take responsibility for their own learning because they are expected to undertake tasks, give information and even critique each other's information in a constructive manner. Stage four of knowledge construction implies that students should engage in conferencing, course-related discussions and critical thinking applied to subject material by making connections between models and work-based learning experiences. On the other hand, tutors are expected to facilitate open activities by asking questions and encouraging reflection. Tutors' involvement is very limited at this stage. This suggests that students know what they need to do and are comfortable with one another on the online tutorial classroom.

The last stage of development is when students use conferencing in a strategic way, integrate Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) into other forms of learning, reflect on learning processes and become critical of the medium. Tutors, on the other hand, support and respond only when required, encourage reflection and are less active by handing the process over to the students. This means that, during this stage, the tutor is in the background and leaves students to work on their own to encourage independent learning which, according to Hockings, Thomas, Ottaway and Jones (2018:146), "is a key feature of university education".

### 2.6.5 Application of the five-stage pedagogical framework to ITM evaluation

During stage one of access and motivation, the tutor sets the pace and rhythm by ensuring that the on-line platform is set up with a welcome message and ensures that students know how to access the on-line group. In stage two of socialisation, the tutor leads a round of introductions to create rapport with and among students. According to McGrath, Gregory, Farley and Roberts (2014:471), an on-line ice-breaker could welcome new students, and create and maintain a social presence and a sense of community. This is accompanied by a list of ground rules which speak to netiquette (internet etiquette). The e-tivities (online activities) given to students at this stage should relate to the traditions of the discipline because this provides the cultural context for learning and makes later knowledge construction easier to achieve. Should individual

students break the netiquette, the tutor should deal with the students privately or through the discussion group strategically for students to learn from the mistakes of others. Quiet students should be encouraged to join in and voice their opinions as this is how they can learn. At the end of each topic discussion, the tutor should provide a summary of online discussions as is done even in F2F tutorial classes.

The tutor can apply information exchange in stage three by providing highly structured activities at the start of the semester. It is at this stage that students are encouraged by the tutor to participate, ask questions and post short messages on the discussion platform. The tutor can also allocate online roles to individual students, for example to lead a certain activity online. This is easier in F2F classes as the tutor and students are in the same venue.

Stage four of knowledge construction is also guided by a social constructivist point of view. At this stage students are expected to construct their own knowledge while the tutor provides more activities and facilitates the learning process by posing questions to the group and encourage them to think critically by questioning theory and practice. In this stage, the tutor increasingly moves towards peer-directed activities that are dominantly led by students while the tutor is in the background and only helps when necessary. For example, a tutor may assign tasks to students to work as groups or pairs without the direct control of a tutor. Dickinson (1987:9) named this type of learning as a self-directed learning approach to teaching and learning.

The last stage of development requires students to demonstrate their ability to work with content and defend their own judgements. Group members increasingly lead discussions and the tutor should encourage students in the class to transfer their skills to other areas of work and encourage reflection on different learning processes.

Salmon’s five-stage approach, “Model of Teaching and Learning Online”, is easily understood and employed by e-tutors or facilitators within higher education (Moule, 2007:27). This model provides a framework for good practices in engaging learners in online discussions and could be useful to guide the ITM used at Unisa so that it takes a

student progressively from one stage to another during the process of learning. The tutor guides a student in the journey of learning and ensures that a student acquires technology skills by referring students who lack this skill to the relevant units within the system. A lack of digital literacy poses a barrier to learning hence, empathy is required from the institutional structure, particularly from the tutor.

## 2.7 Pertinent issues arising from the theories in this study

In light of the above discussion of theories, pertinent issues applicable to this study were identified. The social constructivist theory of learning requires students to work together and construct knowledge. This theory promotes social learning through interaction and individual learning happens as an aspect of social learning. As indicated by Vygotsky (1978:57), before knowledge is constructed at an individual level, it is first constructed on a social level. At a social level, students should also build on their experiences and prior knowledge on the subject matter under discussion (Beck & Kosnik, 2006:10). If students engage with the content on their own, they gain a sense of ownership, become active, practice 21$^{st}$ century skills in communication and engage in knowledge sharing within the context of Ubuntu. The role of a tutor, as guided by this theory, is that of a facilitator, guide and support for collaborative work so that students can construct knowledge.

Connectivism is a theory for the digital age. It therefore requires students studying in DL to have the skills to share information using specialised nodes of information sources found on the internet (Siemens, 2005:3). These nodes do not confine students to a particular place or time so that students are able to engage and share information anytime and anywhere. This theory therefore bridges the gap between space and time, allowing students to engage synchronously and asynchronously. To engage online, Unisa students should be provided with access to the MyUnisa platform, be allowed to create their own profiles, socialise for learning purposes and create knowledge as a team. As students engage effectively online, they develop social skills and their digital skills are enhanced. This means that the university should take care of the realities of

issues of accessibility of online platforms alongside the implementation of online programmes.

Empathy theory is a guiding principle for DE because it influences all activities and services offered in the DE environment (Holmberg, 2003:42). Communication allows students to develop a relationship with the university staff. If communication is strong, then students will be motivated to participate in their learning and identify with the content.

Pertinent issues arise from Salmon's five stage model of e-learning. ITM will not be beneficial for students if there is no access to computers and other physical resources. Students who use the ITM should be motivated for them to continue with their studies and succeed. Collaborative learning is key in this model as students are required to socialise in stage two to learn from one another by exchanging information in stage three, and construct knowledge as a team in stage four as they develop in the discipline.

There are similarities observed between social constructivism, connectivism and Salmon's five stages of e-learning. These theories promote the concept of collaborative learning while connectivism and Salmon's model elevate social constructivism to the online engagements. Students are encouraged to work together as they construct knowledge. These theories promote active learning and the participation of students in their journey while the facilitator guides the learning process with empathy ensuring that students interact actively in the learning environment. Figure 2.2 shows the consolidated complementary relationship between these theories.

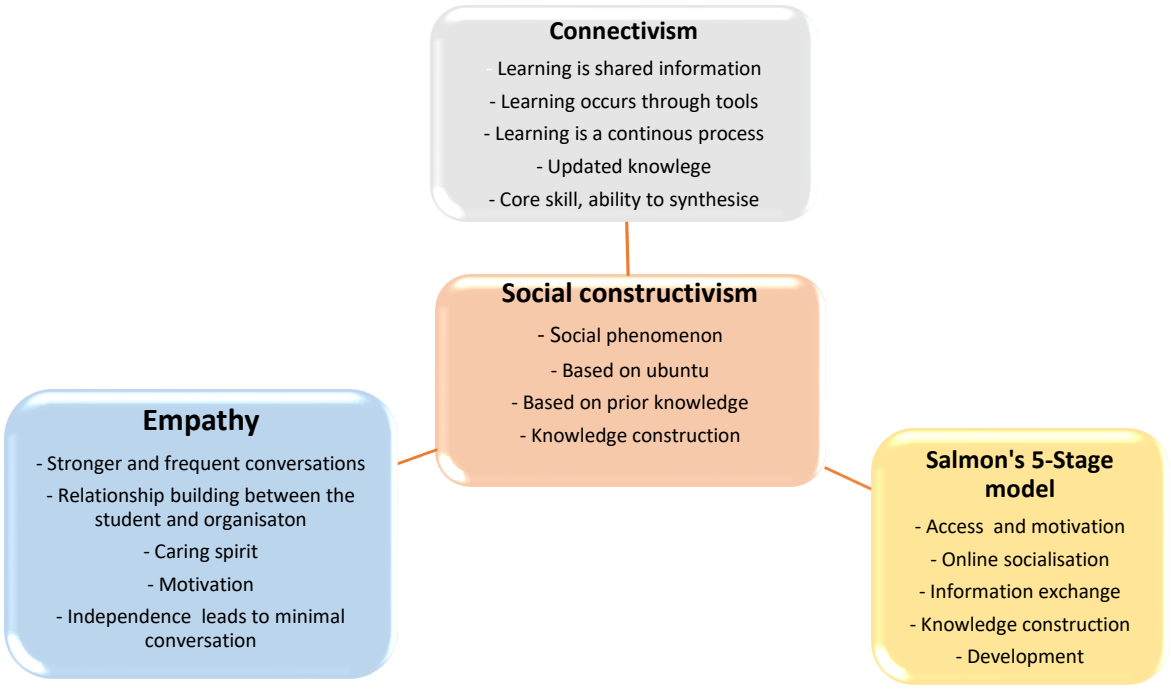


**Figure 2.2: Schematic representation of the integration of the four theories for ITM evaluation and key aspects of each theory**

## 2.8 Conclusion

The discussion of the chosen theories in this chapter looked at the concept of theory and how it is described by various scholars. The study identified four theories that were found to be relevant to explain the phenomenon of ITM used to support students at Unisa. Social constructivism is the main theory guiding this study especially in the F2F part of the ITM. Connectivism is a theory that helps to contextualise social constructivism within online learning in the ITM. The empathy theory of learning applies to both F2F and online tutorial support and Salmon's five stages of e-learning model which guides online learning. The discussion began by defining each theory, describing its characteristics, implications for the study of ITM and how each theory could be applied in ensuring that ITM is effective at Unisa. Each theory has its limitations therefore the discussion also included a criticism of each theory as perceived by scholars. The discussion concluded by highlighting the pertinent issues in these theories. Figure 2.2 helps in visualising the synergy of these theories.

# CHAPTER THREE
# TUTORING IN DISTANCE LEARNING

## 3.1 Introduction

Mudavanhu (2017:190) defines a literature review as a form of a summary of work published or presented by other researchers. However, Boote and Beile (2016:4) argue that a simple description of what others have published or presented in the form of a set of summaries is considered inadequate, instead researchers should provide a complete review of related literature, which takes the form of a critical discussion, showing insight and an awareness of differing arguments, theories and approaches. It is therefore imperative for a researcher to read widely about the topic discussed to be in a position to argue and support the ideas, views and opinions presented about the topic of research at hand. This chapter achieves exactly that as it theoretically responds to the research objectives and questions set for this study. It does this by presenting a discussion of scholarly literature in the field of student support. This is done with a specific focus on the integrated tutor model (ITM) as a support programme provided to Unisa students.

Previous literature and research conducted in tutor support models was surveyed to understand the specific nature of the problems experienced at individual and institutional levels. The discussion touches on the historical development of tutoring in distance learning (DL), with specific reference to Unisa; provides an understanding of the tutoring concept, its impact in the field of DL and the role of a tutor in DL. Against this backdrop, the discussion that follows looks at the historical development of tutoring in DL from the South African point of view and from the viewpoint of other contexts around the world.

## 3.2 Historical development of tutoring in distance learning

The history of tutoring at Unisa dates back to 1959 when the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) identified a gap within higher education and decided to provide

tuition support for students from black communities (Nonyongo, 1998:1; Möwes, 2005:2). One of these NGOs was the South African Committee of Higher Education (SACHED), which pioneered the student support system. According to Nonyongo (1998:1), this organisation was founded in 1959 with an aim of meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities who were desperate for education. The NGO also responded to the crisis in university education brought about by the then National Party government, which separated black students and barred them from receiving education from the then whites-only universities during the apartheid era in South African education. SACHED provided tuition support to students who were enrolled with the University of London in 1959 until 1960. After the disconnection of the University of London from the South African students, SACHED introduced a student support system to Unisa students who did not receive any form of tuition support from the correspondence model of distance education (DE) that was used at that time. Students were vocal about the fact that studying at a distance can be lonely and isolated but, through SACHED's intervention, students became active in their learning journey, motivated to learn and were given an opportunity to construct knowledge on a social level (Seletso, 2010:8).

SACHED tutorials were conducted on a one-to-one basis between students and tutors during those years because the apartheid government prohibited blacks from converging in a group (Nonyongo, 1998:4). Tutors encouraged students to form groups secretly to discuss and assist one another with their subject content (Nonyongo, 1998:4). This model focused on individualisation and personalised support, hence it is called the "personalised tutor support model" as reflected in Figure 3.1. Even though this was a personalised tutor model, the administrators or coordinators of this model saw a need for students to meet and learn from one another hence the model also encouraged collaborative learning.

Africans are group-based in their approach to activities. Since this model serviced black students, this collaboration had to be done in a way that students did not violate the law of the government of the day. One of the strengths of DL is that it emphasises learner-

centredness. This personalised tutor model was aligned with the DL learner-centred pedagogy. According to Cervero and Wilson (1999:29), a learner-centred approach calls for the full involvement of students to allow them to identify their needs. This means that the policies and practices of this approach are characterised by flexibility and the empowerment of students to be self-directed (Mancuso, 2000:4), be independent and take responsibility for their learning. Findings of a study conducted by Seletso (2010:13) posit that "ODL aims at creating independent learners who can be able to handle and solve life challenges with the skills they will have acquired as distance learners".

This model responded to the environmental needs of students as stated in Nonyongo and Ngengebule (1998:4) as it encouraged students to assist one another to solve problems related to their academic engagement with the study material. The model was an attempt to reduce or even close the distance between students and their tutors or lecturers since they were physically separated. Although the model encouraged interaction and peer collaborative learning through study groups, this was illegal given the political context in which this model operated.

The provision of tutor support improved over time. This resulted in the establishment of the tutorial centre model in 1972 for supporting learners from the black communities (Nonyongo, 1998:7) which is the second phase of tutor support model development as reflected in Figure 3.1. According to Nonyongo (1998), the tutorial centre model merged the good practices of the correspondence system of DE and the face-to-face (F2F) aspect as practised by night schools. This model appointed qualified local people as tutors and trained them to encourage group discussions, problem solving and learning skills development. Learner-centredness was highly encouraged by this model. Study centres were established in various cities around the country to facilitate projects that enhanced education among black communities.

After the personalised tutor support model used in the 1960s, SACHED developed tutorial support for Unisa students which was offered in cities such as Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town. These centres were not part of Unisa but were part of

SACHED. In 1994, Unisa saw a need to provide formalised learner support to its students therefore tutorial support was integrated into Unisa's teaching and learning environment in collaboration with various teaching and administrative departments (Prinsloo, 2017:113). Furthermore, F2F tutorial support was also included into the Unisa tuition policy, which was revised in 2013. The delivery of tutorial support services began with six and grew to 38 learning centres between 2007 and 2008 (Prinsloo, 2017:114). Currently, Unisa has 26 regional service centres, which service Unisa students with various learner support programmes including F2F and online learning (OL) tutorial support. It is noted with concern though, that instead of expanding the regional service centres have since reduced from 38 to 26.

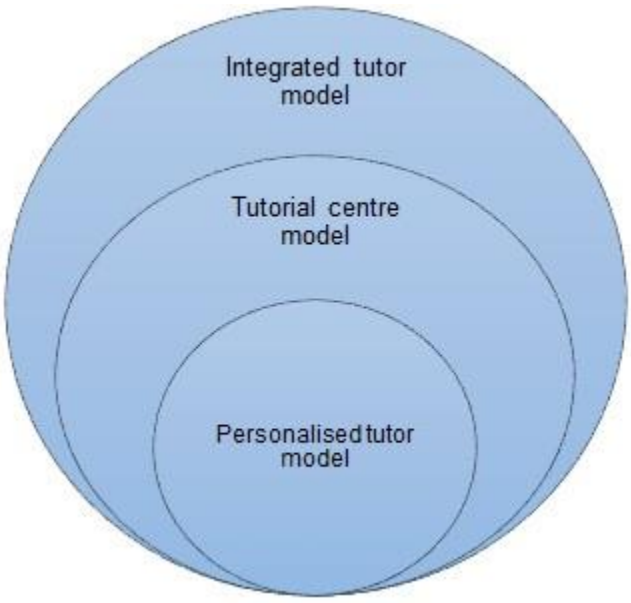


**Figure 3.1: Stages of tutor model development**

In 2012, Unisa embarked on the ITM strategy, which is a tutor model that integrates F2F tutoring with OL to meet the needs of students. International trends of tutoring in higher education reveal that the concept of tutor support is not only a South African concept but is also used around the world. Literature reveals that in countries such as Russia, tutoring dates back to 1762 when schools were under the ecclesiastical council. According to Booyse, Le Roux, Seroto and Woulhuter (2011:68), In Russia tutors were

employed by parents to teach their children at home, i.e. home schooling because there were no schools that could accept them due to political affairs of that time.

Alesksandrovna (2015:492) indicates that tutoring is more of a culture than a technique and, over time, it developed into a culture of teaching and learning. According to Alesksandrovna, tutoring originated in the 11th century when children as young as seven years old were living away from parents at special camps under the supervision of strict mentors, whose purpose was to raise them up as warriors through the total submission to seniors and development of will power. Currently, tutoring is actively adopted by the education systems of many countries.

In Poland, the concept of tutoring dates back to the early 1700s when tutors were employed to perform not only pedagogical duties but were expected to educate a child in all aspects of life and bring about a well-rounded being that is ready to face the world (Kamecka, 2007: 513). These tutors were foreigners who taught the children of village noble families how to read and write before they attended school in the cities. Kamecka (2007:517) distinguishes three types of tutors in Poland during the 1700s. The professional tutors, travel tutors and cultural intermediaries that were educated people who acquired degrees from renowned universities; some of these tutors were professors who had “exceptional knowledge and pedagogical talent” (Kamecka, 2007: 516). The above short historical description of the concept of tutoring in Poland shows that tutoring has been in existence for quite some time in the North-European countries like Poland. People of high professional standing were employed to perform parental and pedagogical duties for the children of the elite families and ensure that they acquire literacy skills as well as excellent interpersonal skills necessary for life before they attend formal schooling.

In American schools and institutions of higher learning, the concept of tutoring has grown so that private companies and academic institutions support their employees and students by using various tutoring strategies. Peer tutoring is used by American universities and schools to promote academic success and reduce dropouts (Montecel, Supik & Montemayor, 1994; Nguyen, Whitt & Middle, 2013). Peer tutoring refers to an

instructional method that uses pairings of high-performing students to tutor lower-performing students in a venue outside the school under the supervision of a teacher. According to Montecel et al. (1994:3), high school learners who are considered to be at risk of dropping out of school are identified and trained to be tutors. These youths are used to teach primary school children and are reimbursed with a stipend to motivate them to tutor children. This strategy is also used at a university level to promote learning and motivate first year students, in particular, who struggle to adjust to their studies. In some South African universities, this concept is currently being used to achieve academic success (Faroa, 2017:1).

In the medieval European universities, the tutoring culture continued to grow significantly. It was first embraced as an educational philosophy and as a primary way of organising education systems by British universities, Oxford and Cambridge (Proskurovskaya, 2009 cited by Alesksandrovna, 2015:493). These universities made use of tutors to teach clergy who were the only literate class in Europe. For example, Tait (2004:99) mentions that at the United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) students were supported by regular F2F tutorials and summer schools, which took place at the local study centres. The purpose of these tutorials was to supplement written materials and audio-visual resources given to students at the time of registration. Telephone tutoring was also used to support students spread throughout Europe (Tait, 2004:101). All this was aimed at overcoming distance that is still a challenge to DE students in some parts of the globe, such as in South Africa, hence the need for this study.

In Africa, the concept of tutoring in various countries, including Botswana, Namibia, Eswatini and Lesotho, is used to support students in institutions of higher learning. In a study undertaken through the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) in 1998, Botswana is reported to have used tutoring to enhance interaction among students and encourage active learning (Molefi & Mphinyane, 1998:19).

Eswatini provides tutor support to primary school teachers, school leavers, employees from the civil service and industry/private sector, and those who fail the Junior Certificate and O-level examinations. F2F tutorial sessions are provided in various

forms at different times of the year. These tutorial sessions include residential courses to guide students who are preparing to sit for the end of year examinations. Tutors provide one-week intensive F2F sessions and one-day sessions to groups of students and students are allowed to get help from tutors whenever they need it (Mazibuko & Mtshali, 1998:189).

In Namibia, for students to succeed in their studies, Namibian institutions of higher learning needed an effective support system from the DL institution. According to Beukes (1998:95), this form of support should include, among others, tutor support, hence F2F tutorials are provided to students enrolled with DE institutions in Namibia. Tutorial sessions are offered to students mainly on weekends. Students have an opportunity to interact with their tutors to get help with challenging areas in their studies. They also meet as students only to assist and motivate one another. This approach to student support is in line with the social constructivist theory of learning as it encourages students to learn together and construct knowledge as a team. Möwes (2005:22) found that the formation of study groups enhances motivation and reduces isolation in distance learning students. Peer relationships are encouraged by putting students in contact with each other but with the introduction of the Protection of Personal Information act (POPI) in South Africa and some other countries around the world, it may not be possible for the university to initiate this kind of relationship since the distribution of personal information in this context is contrary to this act (De Bruyn, 2014:1315). In fact, Unisa has long discontinued this practice for the same reason.

In Botswana, the University of Botswana supports students through F2F tutorial sessions spread throughout the year with professional tutors who are employed to conduct tutorials. Mphinyane and Selepeng-Tau (1998:25) explain that this type of tutor support model is called “residential sessions” and take place twice per semester for one week. The first tutorial session is conducted at the beginning of each academic year and its main focus is for course tutors to introduce students to study materials. The second residential session takes place before the end of the first semester and focuses on skills for tackling assignments. The third session takes place early in the second

semester and is also designed for general academic counselling and introduction to the second module. The last session prepares students for examinations.

The above discussion on the origin of tutoring in various countries suggests that there are different models of tutoring used to facilitate teaching and learning. These models have the ultimate goal of supporting students throughout their learning journey to ensure that they become independent in their learning and close the gap between the institution and the students. Countries around the globe have private tutor agencies with the purpose of supporting learning using a personalised model from primary level up to tertiary level. Some of these tutors perform not only academic duties but also guardianship roles.

The successes and strengths of the personalised tutor model used in various countries lie in the fact that they build character in children and develop the intellectual capabilities of learners in an individualised setting under the guidance of a skilled tutor. In the past, the skills and knowledge of the tutor contributed to the success of this model as it was used by noble families who were prepared to remunerate the tutor. This model suggests that, when a child started formal schooling, he/she would not struggle because the tutor laid a good academic foundation.

The personalised tutor model also has flaws. Since these tutors were charged with the guardianship role of their charges, they influenced the child's development. According to Kamecka (2007:521), the tutor's influence on the formation of the child's personality was motivated by the fact that the child was not attached to parents in the same way as he/she would be to the tutor because the child spent more time with the tutor than with parents. This means that the tutor had more authority in the child's upbringing and a deeper relationship was established. To address this gap in the personalised tutor model, parents drafted a timetable comprising all the activities that the tutor was to follow to ensure that all aspects were addressed as per their expectations. However, the relational gap was still not addressed in this model and this continued to pose a challenge.

In the past, the personalised tutor model used in South African DL was the intervention strategy used to close the transactional gap of students in DL during the apartheid era. The model continues to be used, not only in DL, but also by families to assist their children to improve their performance at school (Kamecka, 2007; Nonyongo, 1998:4). However, this model was challenged by the fact that students in the apartheid era were not able to meet openly and discuss their studies even though this was done secretly. Because of fear of being caught by the police, some students did not risk joining the groups for collaborative learning. The researcher believes that, given the situation, some students started and finished their degrees without meeting with other students studying the same course because of the government policies of the time.

The concept of peer tutoring used in the United States of America (USA) gave students self-confidence and reduced anti-social behaviours among students which ultimately contributed to a good pass rate (Nguyen et. al, 2013:1). However, a lack of funding means that there will be no peer tutoring. Because the financial incentive given to students motivates them to do the work, they are not driven by commitment and passion therefore the model should look at alternative incentives other than financial benefits.

Residential tutoring sessions offered on a F2F basis are practiced in Botswana and Eswatini. The F2F tutor model for DL students addresses the physical and psychological distance between the institution and the students however, its weakness lies in the fact that, should a student be absent from a tutorial class, he/she does not have an alternative way of accessing the discussion. Unfortunately, there are no attempts by the countries mentioned to close these gaps using technology.

The learning centre model, which offers F2F tutoring on weekdays and Saturdays, is still used today in countries like South Africa (Unisa) and Namibia. The strength of this model is that students converge in a central place and attend tutorials. In the case of Unisa, some of these tutorials use video conferencing (VC) facilities in cases where there is no resident tutor in that centre who could offer F2F tutorial support in a specific module. The weakness of this model is found in the absence of a tutor or students. If a tutor is absent, no tutorial is held and if a student is unable to attend a tutorial, she/he

cannot make it up. In the case of Unisa, this weakness is addressed through the use of technology where tutors are required to record sessions so that students who missed them are able to access the sessions. This is yet to be done for most modules. If recording was done in all high-risk modules, this could solve this challenge.

Due to different contexts in various African countries, tutoring models differ to address the students they serve. Models are shaped by the context, the socio-economic strength of a country, the infrastructure and the resources available to provide tutor support to address the needs of students in that particular country. The advent of technology throughout the world can bring about changes in the development of tutor models. For example, issues of costly bandwidth in developing countries in Africa remain a challenge even today and this requires governments to address them accordingly.

## 3.3 The concept of tutoring

Kalimullin and Gabdilkhakov (2014:184) define tutoring as a special type of interaction between tutors and students that may be individual or in a group, distant or F2F, asynchronous or in real-time. Berazhny (2014:374) defines tutoring as “a process of joint professional growth whereby students and the tutor learn from each other, develop trust, and contribute to the quality of studies” while Rekkedal et al. (2006:281) define tutoring as a range of activities that provides learners with the “face” of the ODL institution, helps them to find their way through the materials provided, facilitates learning, as opposed to lecturing, and ensures individual feedback that is not provided in typical ODL materials.

The definitions above show the involvement of two parties who contribute to the teaching and learning process, and highlight issues of interaction, consultation, joint activities done by the tutor and students, individual feedback and professional growth. In the light of these definitions and their commonalities, this study defines tutoring as an act of facilitating learning by providing guidance to students, be it F2F or Online Learning (OL). It involves leading the way, encouraging personal interaction among students and making them feel part of the student community as well as providing

constructive feedback within a reasonable time. The reason for this suggested definition is that the definitions above do not cover issues of personal interaction among students. This study emphasises the importance of collaborative learning among students and not only between the tutor and a student. For students to be independent in their learning, they need to assist and learn from one another. This is a very important aspect in the learning process of tutoring in a distance learning environment particularly within the African context considering the philosophy of social interaction and arrangement in many Africans contexts.

From the above definitions, it is clear that the ultimate goal of tutoring is to ensure that learning occurs in the process under the guidance of an experienced person in the subject content. To experience a successful tutoring, there should be an action between two subjects, i.e. a tutor and student, who both contribute to the learning process. In the light of the suggested definition for this study, the tutor-tutee interaction should also culminate into the tutee-tutee interaction. The absence of these interactions cannot assist the learning process effectively. It should be noted that traditionally, tutoring focused only on F2F interaction of tutors with students. However, with the introduction of technology, this form of student support continues to be expanded to OL platforms, which include video conferencing, telephone, social media, cell phone and computer-mediated type of support. That is where the integration of tutoring comes in.

### 3.3.1 Impact of tutoring on distance learning

Tutoring serves as a dropout reduction strategy as it increases motivation among students and enhances interaction and social learning. Figure 3.2 demonstrates the impact of the concept of tutoring in DL, which receives attention in the sub-headings that follow.

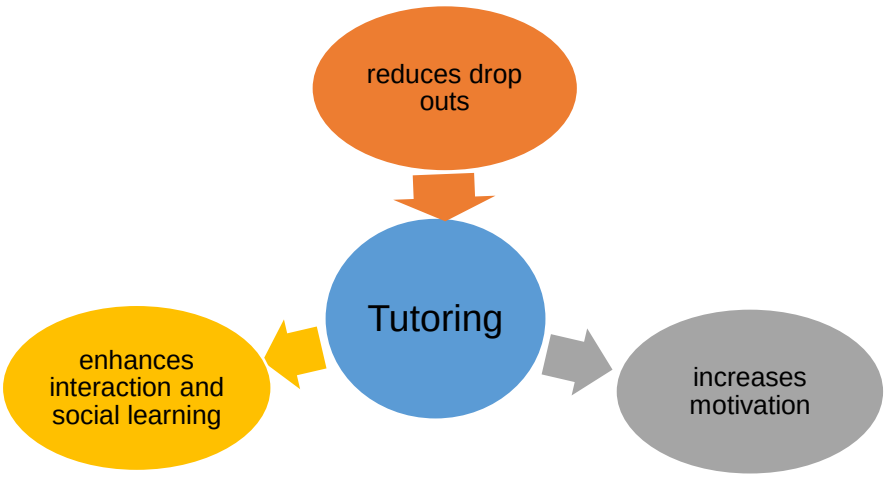


**Figure 3.2: The role of tutoring in Distance Learning**

### 3.3.1.1 Tutoring serves as a dropout reduction strategy

At the beginning of each academic year or semester, many thousands of students register to study with various institutions of higher learning. Some of these students do not even commence with their studies, while others begin by doing a portion of the course work but do not finish their studies. Christensen and Spackman (2017:1) indicate that some of these students pay a full registration fee and subsequently drop out. Consequently, many universities do not reach graduation targets set out by the DHET for each institution annually (Moodley & Singh, 2015:91).

A high dropout rate is a global concern for many universities. This challenge does not only affect second and third world countries however, it also affects first world countries. For example, in a study commissioned by Moodley and Singh (2015:92), the dropout rate at Victoria University in Australia was around 25% for the period 1994–2003, University of Leeds around 8,6%, University of Edinburgh around 22.0% and Ontario's universities had an attrition rate of 43% between 1998 and 2003.

According to Letseka and Maile (2008:5), the dropout rate in South African Universities between 2003 and 2005 is estimated at 78%. Of that figure, 50% enrolled but did not continue with their studies and 28% studied but did not graduate. The majority of students dropped out during the first and second years of study. In the year 2000, 30%

of first year students dropped out while only 22% of first years eventually went on to graduate (Adam, Backhouse, Baloyi & Barnes, 2010:35). The current study's findings create a need to review the current tutoring model at Unisa so that students can be better served to address the dropout and failure rates.

There is no single reason why students drop out of the universities. However, literature cites various reasons that range from non-affordability, poverty, support from the university, students' level of preparedness, uncertainty in qualifications chosen by students and a lack of effective academic support programmes (Letseka & Maile, 2008; Moeketsi & Mgutshini, 2014; Moodley & Singh 2015; Christensen & Spackman, 2017). One of reasons cited above is that universities lack effective tutor support systems that would assist students and guide them to success in their studies. Faroa (2017:1) believes that an impactful and relevant response is needed to address the above-mentioned challenges faced by DL students and to assess current tutoring models.

Student support in the form of tutoring is essential for distance students to understand the environment in which they study for their qualifications and to contribute to students' success. Tait (2003:4) indicates that student support, especially tutor support, "reinforces the students' sense of confidence, self-esteem and progress". The researcher opines that if students' needs for tutor support are met as they enter the university system, the dropout rate may be reduced.

Moodley and Singh (2015) embarked on a study, which addressed student dropout rates at South African universities. The purpose of the study was to examine students' perceptions of how dropping out of university could have been avoided, thereby increasing throughput rates. Students who had dropped out from universities in South Africa were interviewed. The findings of the study showed that incorrect career choices, insufficient funding and inadequate academic support were the primary factors that led to the dropout of students. The recommendation made by this study is that university departments should align their support programmes with modules that have a high failure rate to help students to pass. The current study addressed the gaps in academic support that contribute to students' dropout rates in universities and contributes to the

body of knowledge in the area of enhanced academic support, specifically tutor support. Thus, the current study expands on the third main finding of Moodley's and Singh's study, but with specific reference to an ODL institution, i.e., Unisa and on tutor support.

To address the challenge of student dropout in universities, Swail (1995:21) developed a retention strategy model citing five components which work together to address students' needs for support. One of the components is academic support, which includes tutoring and mentoring. This model suggests that, without such interventional strategies, students tend to delay completing their qualifications or lose interest and ultimately drop out of their studies (Fröhlich 2007:ix; Nguyen et al., 2013:1). According to Muilenburg and Berge (2005:29), low motivation has been identified as a decisive factor in contributing to the high dropout rates from online courses. This study also looked into strategies that could be used by universities to motivate students through tutoring to reduce dropout rates and enhance their academic success.

A study was conducted by Wilks, Fleeton and Wilson (2017) at the University of Southern Cross and Victoria University of Wellington in Australia. The purpose of the study was to investigate an Indigenous Tutor Assistant Scheme (ITAS) through the perspectives of tutors and students. ITAS provides tutorial support to students coming from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. This scheme provides students with two hours of individual or group tutoring per week per subject for undergraduate students plus five supplemental hours for examination preparation for eligible students. Limited tutoring is made available for postgraduate students or students undertaking bridging or preparatory courses. Qualitative research methods, i.e., semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, were used to gather data from tutors, ITAS coordinators and students from two regional universities in New South Wales where the scheme was provided. The findings of the study reveal that ITAS tutoring had enabled many students to manage their transition through university and to complete their studies. On the other hand, tutors and students identified gaps in the scheme in terms of guidelines, institutional expectations, access to learning management systems and the timing of support. The study's outcomes suggested that ITAS provides valuable support but has

become static and was not keeping up with developments in online learning and administration. The study provides valuable information relevant to the current study. However, it does not include peer interaction as a form of support to students nor does it include developing students to be autonomous in their journey of higher education. In the light of the tutoring definition provided above, this study lacks the role that tutors should play in effective learning, which my study completes.

Rahmasari (2017) investigated peer tutoring as an effective technique to teach reading comprehension. The purpose of this study was “to describe the use of peer tutoring in teaching reading and what happens with the class when a peer-tutoring technique is applied” (Rahmasari, 2017:245). The findings of the study reveal that peer tutoring could motivate students, increase their self-confidence, get them involved as active participants in the learning environment and assist them to move away from dependency to autonomy thus reducing tutor dominancy in a tutorial class. Further findings of the study reveal that having a high number of pairs in peer tutoring tutorial classes can be a disadvantage as it was difficult for the tutor to monitor and assist all pairs that needed help. Peer tutoring is a strategy that can assist in the development of students and boost their confidence as they become independent learners. This study describes how peer learning can be managed in class as expected in an ODL learning environment.

Nguyen et al. (2013) conducted a study on peer tutoring as a strategy to promote academic success. The purposes of the study were to examine the benefits of peer tutoring based on existing research on peer-assisted learning strategies, identify the best practices for peer tutoring and provide recommendations based on best practices. The main finding was that peer tutoring is the most effective strategy to engage students and promote academic success. The recommendations made in this study included selecting highly capable peer tutors, i.e., students who are academically gifted and have a passion for assisting others to be involved in peer tutoring programmes to assist low performing students and mentor them for academic success. The institution would conduct effective tutor training so that they are able to deliver as expected and

continuously monitor the peer tutors to intervene when necessary. The weakness in the current ITM is that there is no formalised peer tutoring for Unisa students. The intervention that the current study suggests can assist students to support one another in a more effective way that is also attuned to the African approach.

#### 3.3.1.2 Tutoring as a motivational strategy for students

Motivation in DL contributes towards students' progress. Moore and Kearsley (2005:163) indicate that students choose to study in DE for various reasons. It may be because they were not able to study when they were younger, they are driven by achieving personal goals, they may want to acquire additional qualifications or they dropped out from higher education and want to complete it. According to Peters (2013:49), the majority of such students are located in developing countries and may not be able to afford campus-based university fees because of their socio-economic backgrounds. In support of Peters, Ngengebule (2003:157) asserts that majority of these students come from economically and educationally deprived black communities that cannot afford higher education. The flexibility of the DE programme is an added advantage for such students because they can study anywhere, at any time and can work and study at the same time (Sithole, Ikotun & Onyari, 2013:2; Gumbo, 2016a). The flexible character of DE assists students to work and support their families while they study through DE programmes. Betts and Burrell (2014 cited by Faroa, 2017:2), emphasise the importance of the inclusion of all students in support programmes like tutoring to enhance integration of previously excluded groups.

When students are overwhelmed by the demands made by their studies, their level of motivation declines and some may drop out. O'Rourke (2003:45) states that "providing motivation is an important tutoring skill because ODL students face many challenges and they may need extra encouragement to tackle these challenges". Visser, Plomp, Amirault and Kuiper (2002:95) argue that detecting motivational problems in a campus-based higher education institution should be easier than in a DE institution because lecturers and tutors are constantly in touch with students and are able to deal with motivational issues as soon as they are detected. On the contrary, this is not the case

with DE institutions because students and lecturers are separated by distance. As a result, students' lack of motivation could go unnoticed and they may not receive assistance to increase their levels of motivation. This may be due to the fact that students do not know where to find the assistance they require.

Mackiewicz and Thompson (2014:63) indicate that motivation influences and is influenced by students' interest in the tasks that they are performing. Consequently, these researchers suggest that tutors can enhance students' motivation by helping them feel comfortable in the learning environment and supporting them from time to time. Tutors can employ a variety of strategies to motivate their students during F2F tutorial sessions and OL sessions by doing the following:

- Showing concern by creating rapport and demonstrating that they care;
- Pointing out students' successes with positive feedback and verbal rewards;
- Reinforcing students' ownership and control: Tutors can increase students' development of self-regulation and self-efficacy by asserting that the student ultimately makes the decisions;
- Using humour and being optimistic: Tutors can reduce students' anxiety with light-heartedness and build confidence by asserting a student's ability to persevere in the task; and
- Giving sympathy and empathy: Tutors can express their understanding that the task is difficult.

Qureshi, Morton and Antosz (2002:2) indicate that DE students are more motivated and achievement oriented compared to campus-based students because they are focused on their studies even though they may be employed and have families to support.

DL students' motivation depends on their online presence and willingness to engage with the platforms provided by the institution. Bekele (2010) conducted a review study on motivation and satisfaction in Internet-Supported Learning Environments (ISLEs) in higher education institutions. It looked at specific motivation and satisfaction sources

and measured motivation using the following elements (Bekele, 2010:118):

- Technology factors, which are technology attributes and user (student) skills, experiences, or views;
- Course factors, which refer to elements needed in course design, for example, course relevance, organisation, goal clarity and flexibility;
- Support factors, which include technology leadership and support provided by tutors, administrators, and peers;
- Task choices, which are free selections of task that indicate students' motivation to perform a task;
- Effort learning, which requires cognitive effort particularly on challenging tasks. A high effort indicates high motivation;
- Persistence, which refers to "time spent on a task"

(Pintrich & Schunk, 2002:14).

Bekele (2010:118) conducted a mixed-methods study by collecting and analysing data from multiple sources to respond to the research problem. The current study on ITM at Unisa also used mixed-methods research to provide a deeper understanding of the research problem and to produce the knowledge necessary to inform theory and practice. ISLE does not only focus on technology-driven course but also on traditional F2F courses that have a technology aspect in their delivery (Bekele, 2010:118). The findings of the study indicate that technology, course quality, engagement, programme format and support services-maintained students' motivation and satisfaction. The findings show that ISLEs support students' motivation and satisfaction and, in some cases, were more effective than traditional learning. The study further found that motivation and performance were positively related. The study concluded that ISLEs are as effective as the traditional settings as far as student motivation and satisfaction are concerned. This suggests that, when students are motivated, chances of dropping out from the course are reduced. This study shows that the ITM needs to incorporate

strategies that retain students' motivation to prevent them dropping out of their studies. Currently the tutor model used at Unisa does not have sufficient motivational strategies built into the tutor programme. Online discussions where students meet with other students and discuss the challenges of the subject content should be included. This study fills this gap and suggests other strategies that can assist Unisa students to stay motivated.

Harnett, St. George and Dron (2016) examined motivation in online distance learning environments. A case study was used to explore the complex phenomenon of motivation to advance the understanding of pre-service teachers in two online distance learning contexts. Data were collected through online questionnaires, interviews, archived online data and course resources. Twenty-one students participated in the study. The findings of the study reveal that students were not primarily intrinsically motivated. Instead, student motivation was complex, multifaceted and sensitive to situational conditions. Some of the complexities cited in the study include technological challenges experienced by students and ongoing online communication by tutors to motivate students to engage more with the subject content. Technological challenge is confirmed by Gumbo (2016a:23) who indicates that the "complexity of digital spaces could demotivate students' perseverance with regard to their online academic activities". DL students should therefore be supported with relevant tutoring programmes to stay motivated and to succeed in their studies.

Literature reveals that even though technology is used to motivate and engage students studying online, students can feel isolated that may lead to demotivation. Harnett et al. (2016:6) submit that feelings of isolation, frustrations with technology and time constraints due to other responsibilities contribute to motivation issues in DL settings. Similarly, Gumbo (2016a:18) suggests that students be supported from the time they enter the ODL environments through orientation programmes. Similarly, Ntuli (2016:20) found that, to support students to overcome isolation and stay motivated as they study in DL, there is a need for them to participate in the tutorial programme which is a strategic initiative implemented by Unisa.

Motivation could also be increased by ensuring that students do not study alone but that they interact in a community of learners who are studying the same module either OL or F2F. The discussion that follows shows how interaction contributes to the learning journey of students in Distance Learning Environments (DLEs).

#### 3.3.1.3 Tutoring promotes interaction and social learning

Interaction is a part of DL that applies to both F2F and OL environments (Ntuli, 2016:31). According to Moore (1993:22), the distance that exists in DL is said to be a transactional distance which is associated with "psychological and communication space". Moore suggests that if this distance is not managed, it may lead to misunderstanding between students and tutors in DE, and that, if learning outcomes are to be maximised, transactional distance needs to be minimised. This study contributes to a body of knowledge to reduce distance in DE through the use of tutor support programmes that relate to students' contexts and culture.

Moore identifies three elements that need to work together to take distance out of learning. These are dialogue or interaction between students and tutors, the structure of the course (methods and strategies used to teach DE students) and autonomy or the degree of self-directness of the student. These elements are in line with the theory of transactional distance, which needs the three elements to work together in DE to support students. If institutions of higher learning put support structures in place that will ensure that the three elements work together, the psychological and communication distance will narrow and successful learning will take place.

Moore and Kearsley (2012:132) identified three types of interactions in DL, i.e., learner-instructor interaction, learner-content interaction and learner-learner interaction. For purposes of this study, the term "learner" will be replaced with the term "student" and the term "instructor" will be replaced with the term "tutor".

Hillman, Willis and Gunawardena (1994:34) introduced student-interface interaction (S-I-I) as an additional dimension to the construct. With the fast-growing use of technology

in DL, students need to interact with the interface, which will enable them to learn. The study will therefore discuss these four types of interactions, which form part of the learning journey of a student and contribute towards successful learning.

#### *3.3.1.3.1 Student-tutor interaction (STI)*

According to the definition of tutoring in this study, the tutor is expected to guide the learning process. If there is no guidance from the tutor, interaction will be limited and it will be difficult for learning to take place. In this type of interaction, tutors are expected to provide feedback to students. Pyke and Sherlock (2010:2) explain that “the central instructional factor in DE is generally the instructor-learner interaction". These authors conducted a case study, which analysed the tutor-student feedback online. According to Pyke and Sherlock (2010), there are three types of feedback, corrective, motivational and technological. Corrective feedback focuses on a specific task of the subject content that students find challenging. Motivational feedback focuses on the student. In this case, the tutor comments in a way that assists the student to regain self-control and increase intrinsic motivation. The technological feedback guides the student on how to best use technology and navigate the interface.

This case study used document analysis to examine feedback in an online course over a full semester. Feedback interactions were coded as either individual or team feedback and then coded as corrective, motivational, or technology-related. The findings of the study show that the highest rate of feedback was corrective. This was followed by motivational feedback and the lowest rate of feedback was technological. Another finding was that teams received a greater amount of corrective feedback, whereas individuals required greater motivational feedback. The study concluded that tutors need to take leadership, provide direction for students online and give corrective feedback, which will also motivate students to take control of their learning. The study does not overlook the fact that students should receive technological feedback from tutors and that tutors need to proactively address technological issues before they derail students’ progress. This shows that tutors are faced with a huge responsibility of guiding

the learning process and, at the same time, initiating conversations online. The findings of this study suggest that there is a need to support students who are studying in isolation. The current study provides strategies for integrating isolated students into groups or providing buddies for an improved and positive outcome in their studies. Such strategies can motivate students to participate and be active learners on online and F2F platforms.

In support of the case study discussed above, Ertmer et al. (2007:413) indicate that, when students receive feedback from the tutor, they are able to reflect, correct and clarify their performance. Furthermore, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006:206) suggest that feedback serves as a form of formative assessment designed to improve and accelerate learning. According to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), good feedback:

- clarifies what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards);
- facilitates the development of self-assessment and reflection;
- delivers high quality information to students about their learning;
- encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning; and
- encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem.

This means that the tutor's feedback is at the centre of the learning environment in DE if used correctly. On the other hand, negative feedback, late feedback and no feedback given to students can serve as destructors and catalysts for students to drop out and can serve as demotivators for students who are not self-driven (Ertmer et al., 2007:414). S-T-I in DE, therefore, calls for tutors who understand that, for the students to be active in all the environments of DE, they need to initiate interaction, be present and provide constructive feedback, and that this should be coupled with a sense of immediacy.

Moore (1989:4) also argues that S-T-I motivates and stimulates the student and allows for the clarification of misunderstandings by the student regarding content. Moore's view confirms that S-T-I could be either motivational or corrective in nature. There is no doubt that tutor and student presence are crucial for learning to take place. Interaction and

feedback are important behaviours influencing student motivation and involvement, and this is mostly incumbent on the tutor who should initiate communication with students (Paul & Cochran, 2013:51) to encourage them to be fully involved in the learning process.

Paul and Cochran (2013:51) believe that immediacy, presence and feedback are important aspects of S-T-I. They explain that immediacy could be achieved by initiating discussion through the provision of positive comments to students. The initiation of communication is incumbent upon the tutor facilitating or guiding the learning process. Paul and Cochran (2013) note that immediacy is possible in both F2F tutorials and OL; however, it needs commitment from students as well. Students need to be active online to experience immediacy and students receiving F2F tutorial support should participate in the sessions. Without this commitment, immediacy will not serve its purpose.

Paul and Cochran (2013:51) also provide examples of how immediacy could be achieved by tutors. For instance, they indicate that tutors could "ask questions, use self-disclosure, address students by names, use inclusive personal pronouns, respond frequently to students, offer praise, and communicate attentiveness". They explain that presence is an aspect of interaction in DE that impacts students' journeys in the process of learning. According to Paul and Cochran (2013), facilitation of learning by the tutor and provision of "weekly announcements" are ways of achieving presence in online classrooms. O'Rourke (2003:35) shares the same sentiments indicating that the tutor should give encouragement to a student in difficulties when student needs it most.

#### *3.3.1.3.2 Student-student-interaction (S-S-I)*

Some students enter the DE environment unprepared after finishing school because they are not only transitioning from a classroom-based type of learning but also from F2F to DL. Sher (2009:104) defines student-student interaction (S-S-I) as:

> "an exchange of information and ideas that occurs among students about the course in the presence or absence of the instructor. This type of interaction can take the

> form of group projects, or group discussion, etc. The student-student interaction can foster learning through student collaboration and knowledge sharing."

This definition emphasises the aspect of sharing information through various platforms and strategies. For instance, Sher (2009) refers to the sharing of ideas through the use of groups and projects but groups should not be too large preventing the tutor from monitoring activities OL or F2F. The S-S-I can also happen without a tutor particularly in a DLE since students are expected to be independent in their learning and the pedagogical approach in DE is learner-centred.

Lee, Spear and Kero (2017:11) note that, prior to conducting their study, there was a "belief that a feeling of belonging is more likely when graduate students attend class F2F or with robots but not so when they are solely online". Lee et al. (2017:11) therefore conducted a study on the perceptions of social presence among public university graduate students enrolled in synchronous and asynchronous coursework. An online survey was used to collect data from 227 graduate students enrolled in educational leadership courses at a medium size public university in the United States. Of the 227 students, 81 students responded to the survey questionnaire. The findings of the study reveal that there was no difference between F2F and online social presence. This means that students are gradually getting familiar with technology and how to use it. This study also asserts that, when students come together and learn, they develop soft skills in educational leadership courses that build their interpersonal relationship skills (Lee et al., 2017:7). This study therefore suggests strategies to encourage students to use technology to benefit them in their studies.

Students beginning DL programmes may be unsure about what to expect or the standard of work required at the university (Croft et al., 2010:33). However, through interacting with other students, they get an opportunity to learn, exchange information and share ideas (Sher, 2009:104), construct knowledge, support and motivate one another in the absence of the tutor. In this way, another objective of DL is achieved since, when students engage with one another independently of the tutor, their sense of autonomy is enhanced.

Students who study the same course attend tutorials together or meet online can build relationships by forming groups or finding “study buddies”. According to Borup (2016:232), historically, DE contained little or no S-S-I; instead, students studied in isolation. However, the introduction of technology has changed this culture and brought students together irrespective of their geographical locations. Anderson (2009:111) asserts that, as technology advances, more user-friendly technologies are created and improved to support new forms of interaction, pedagogy and support services.

Fröhlich (2007:23) argues that, when students come together to study, they get an opportunity to learn from one another, participate within course processes, build communities of learning where meaningful and personalised learning takes place, and they learn to value one another’s perspectives. This interaction can also assist students to be creative and solve one another’s academic problems. Palloff and Pratt (2007 cited by Borup, 2016:232) warns that S-S-I should be meaningful as not setting proper objectives may leave students feeling isolated and demotivated. In this situation, a tutor can monitor discussions, comment on them, correct a point or call students to order if they divert from the discussion. A tutor’s presence during these S-S-Is assists the group to reach their objectives as they interact with each other. This type of interaction can occur F2F or via OL. Students can use various social media platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp groups, blogs and wikis, and use them to socialise and enhance communication outside of the F2F and OL tutorial classes.

Christensen (1997 cited by Mbatha, 2015:220) refers to these technologies as “disruptive learning innovations”. According to Mbatha (2015), the term “disruptive”, in this context, does not have a negative connotation as disruptive learning refers to creative or innovative learning. Evans and Pauling (2010:216) explain that disruptive technology is a term used to describe a new technology that unexpectedly displaces an established technology. For example, mobile phones, tablets and smartboards are regarded as disruptive technology because, when these technologies were introduced, they forced institutions of higher learning to change the way they deliver their services to students in terms of communication, supply of study material and tuition support.

Unisa uses smartboards to tutor students in various locations by using Brigit software, which allows a tutor to be in one location but able to connect with students around the country and provide tutoring which is more interactive in nature. This technology provides opportunities to use the board while students are watching in all the centres. A tutor is also able to connect to the internet and share a presentation with all students. Brigit software is used to meet the needs of students needing tutor support in various areas around the country. Because of this innovative technology, students can to access and participate in online tutorials with their own smartphones and tablets.

According to the researcher's observation of students in the F2F tutorial programme at Unisa, most students use WhatsApp groups to interact outside the classroom. Of particular interest at Unisa is that WhatsApp is also used by tutors, synchronously or asynchronously, to create platforms for students to interact with them and with one another to clarify academic issues.

Disruptive technology has become popular among Unisa students as it transforms and promotes social learning. In the researcher's interactions with tutors during meetings and training workshops, tutors indicated that students prefer to use WhatsApp to communicate and socialise rather than the formal platform developed by Unisa. This means that the university has no control over the platforms that are operating outside of the Learning Management System (LMS) MyUnisa, which was developed for this purpose. The university may therefore have to devise a strategy that would manage social media platforms that are used outside of the LMS.

#### *3.3.1.3.3 Student-content-interaction (S-C-I)*

Swan (2010:1) explains that "the interaction of learner with content refers to learners interacting with knowledge, skills and attitudes being studied. It refers to learners interacting with course material". Moore (1989:2) also points out that S-C-I is the process of "intellectually interacting with content" to bring about changes in the learner's understanding, perspective or cognitive structures. Moore and Kearsley (2012:132) hold the same view by indicating that, when students interact with the content, their

understanding moves from one level up to another and their perspective changes.

A study was conducted by Zimmerman (2012) at a large higher education institution in the United States on learner-to-content interaction in DL. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between learner-content interaction and course grades to determine if that interaction type was successful. Data were collected from the grade book or the statistical reports sections on the Course Management System (CMS). This was done since students were required to complete both a discussion assignment and a five-question quiz each week. The findings of the study reveal that students who spent more time interacting with content required less time to complete quizzes and received higher grades. This shows that there is a correlation between learner-content interaction and good results.

On the contrary, Xiao (2017:123 citing Daniel & Marquis, 1988) suggests that there is no interaction involved in studying written materials. Wagner (1994:8) agrees by indicating that interaction is “reciprocal events that require at least two objects and two actions” and argues that “Interactions occur when these objects and events mutually influence one another”. Xiao (2017:123) believes that interaction is not necessarily reciprocal in the sense that two or more parties involved influence each other. The learner materials, such as study materials, tutorial letters, textbooks, etc., are “human artefacts” produced by human writers who communicate with students and tutors and that reading is a process whereby “writers can influence readers but not the other way round” (Xiao 2017:123) but readers can also influence writers as, in technology driven learning spaces, readers have opinions and they see various concepts from different perspectives. If students are given the opportunity to comment on a certain material, they must do so constructively to assist the writer to improve the material or see another perspective on the topic under discussion.

Fröhlich (2007) conducted a study for the Southern African Development Community (SADC) based on the experiences of adult education practitioners across the African region. One of the topics investigated in this study was about supporting adult learning and tutoring in DL. Case studies were used to draw from the experiences of adult

education practitioners within SADC. The study found that one of the successful ways of ensuring that students engage with content is when a tutor provides on course opportunities for students to read the course material, discuss it among themselves, and then briefly present the key ideas to the rest of the group. Such spaces of engagement create a sense of self-directedness and sense of community.

This study shows the importance of engaged students to develop autonomy. Students would benefit even more if support was also provided to them online. Online support would be an added advantage for students to participate and engage with the content, the tutor and other students anywhere and anytime as they would not need to be physically present in a certain location for active engagement. The ITM study contributes towards filling the gap about access and suggests strategies that can benefit students studying in DL.

In another study conducted at Rhodes University, Fröhlich (2007:19) explored how modes of delivery shape learning and tutoring in various contexts. Three types of delivery modes are explained ranging from F2F in a full time or campus-based university, semi-distance which is partly face-to-face and partly distance, and distance education where most learning happens through written material, but there is still some contact with a facilitator or teacher who gives support (Fröhlich, 2007:19). According to this researcher, the more DE has F2F support, the less self-instructional it is and with less F2F support, self-instruction increases (Fröhlich, 2007:19). The finding of this study was that delivery modes shape both the learning processes and the support needed by the learners and tutors.

The study above shows that S-C-I and S-S-I can converge when spaces of engagement are created and students use them profitably and interact among themselves with or without the tutor's presence. Anderson, Upton, Dron, Malone and Poelhuber (2015:15) also allude to the fact that, when students engage with content, they often refer directly to the text and provide comments to support critical reflections. This is true in F2F tutorials and OL spaces (Anderson et al., 2015:7). Anderson et al. (2015) indicate that, when students interact with the content, those who are already in the field of work get

the opportunity to share their experiences with those who are not in the field yet and they are able to construct a deeper understanding of practice in various contexts. As a result, the latter gain new knowledge about the field of their study (Anderson et al., 2015:18).

Conversely, it should be noted that some research shows that the majority of students interact and participate in tutorials because it is a reward driven activity. Such students are extrinsically motivated by the fact that they will receive a mark for engaging with the content via OL or F2F. Anderson et al. (2015:18) explain that the issue of rewards and incentives for student activity has long been a subject of heated debate among educators and researchers because, as Kohn (1993:3) states, “rewards cannot work, they simply change behavior just for a short period of time … they do not create a long-lasting commitment and they merely change what we do”. Anderson et al. (2015) support this notion by indicating that, after students were given marks for participating in OL group discussions during the course of study, they did not continue to engage with content through OL as they were expected to. Students knew that their marks were submitted for attending and therefore it was unnecessary for them to continue engaging in the discussion forum. It is the researcher’s view that some behaviours need to be changed to achieve a specific objective. According to the researcher, it is not incorrect to give incentives to students who participate since their participation will help them to achieve the module’s learning outcome.

Tutors are encouraged to discuss the importance of interacting with the content as a way to achieve success in DL but Zimmerman (2012:153) disagrees by saying that “to date, very few empirical studies have attempted to examine the role that learner–content interaction plays in course success outcomes”. This is therefore an area that needs to be researched further in DL.

The discussion above has shown the importance of students’ interaction with the content and how this type of interaction could benefit students as they progress with their studies in a Distance Learning Environment (DLE). Student content interaction cannot be done in isolation as students’ need each other to succeed; hence student-

student interaction, student-tutor interaction and content-student interaction are interrelated to ensure the success of students on their journey of learning.

#### *3.3.1.3.4 Student-interface interaction (S-I-I)*

Hillman et al. (1994:34) introduced S-I-I as a fourth dimension to the concept of interaction in DL. S-I-I suggests that, for OL tutorials, the student has to interact with some form of technology as part of the course requirements to enhance cognition (Zimmerman, 2012:153). Hillman et al. (1994:34) explain that S-I-I is a process of using the tools of technology to accomplish a task. This means that students who study through DL should possess skills and knowledge on how to use technology for learning as this will help them to interact with the tutor, the content and other learners (Hillman et al., 1994:3). Furthermore, Hillman et al. (1994) warn that DL educators should not underestimate the implications of the S-S-I paradigm. They should take this challenge seriously and come up with a strategy that can empower students who do not have these skills and knowledge, otherwise there is a high possibility that such students will drop out of the DL system.

According to Garrison (1989:50), “the effectiveness of the educational transaction is dependent upon the facilitation of communication and the active involvement of the learner”. It is therefore necessary that students entering DL be equipped with technological skills to operate in this environment. Universities have embarked on programmes that provide technological skills to students because a number of students who enter university lack such skills and this becomes a barrier to their active interaction in the learning process. For example, Unisa has established technology enhanced learning laboratories throughout the country. Digital Learning Advisors (DLAs) employed in these laboratories train students in a number of areas from logging onto the Unisa online environment, using Microsoft packages, sending in assignments and downloading materials.

Bates and Sangra (2011:4) state that institutions invest in virtual learning environments or technologies to cut costs and enable students to construct knowledge by themselves.

Students interact with content, tutors and other students using these learning environments to find resource material that is relevant to them. These technologies, such as podcasts, libraries, laboratories and DVDs among other interactive resources, assist them to interact with the content. Students are also able to interact with one another, form groups online and assist one another in various ways. Thus, S-S-I is not a unique form of interaction but rather a component of each of the other forms of interaction whenever they occur in a DE context (Zimmerman, 2012:155).

Learning in the 21st century requires students to have technological skills that assist them to interact with the interface using handheld gadgets. Leh, Kouba and Davis (2005) conducted a study on 21st century learning communities, interactions and ubiquitous computing. Data were collected by reviewing literature and included a case study of a teacher who used a hand-held device to enhance learning in her class. Based on her observations and her experience, findings reveal that learner-community interactions should be added as another type of interaction (Leh et al., 2005:247) however, further research needs to be done on it to show how it differs from student-student-interaction.

In addition to the above types of interactions, Anderson (2003:3) describes three more types of interaction in DLE, teacher-teacher interaction (T-T-I), teacher-content interaction (T-C-I) and content-content interaction (C-C-I). These interactions should be implemented to benefit students in DE.

#### *3.3.1.3.5 Teacher-teacher interaction (T-T-I)*

Anderson (2003:6) emphasises that “teacher-teacher collaboration is critical to the current model of university-based research production and evaluation”. According to Anderson (2008:16), teachers also need to interact to develop themselves in their profession as teachers. Leh et al. (2005:238) posit that humans are social beings with an instinctive need and desire to exchange information with fellow community members. This kind of interaction takes place among people who share the same interests and are trying to address issues within their area of expertise. These groups are known as

Communities of Practice (CoPs). According to Wenger (1998:1), CoPs are “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”. Wenger lists three crucial characteristics that define a CoP, a domain, community and practice. Furthermore, Wenger states that CoPs can operate in education, organisations, governments, associations, international development, the web and social sectors.

Tutors in DL should form CoPs to afford themselves opportunities for growth by sharing the knowledge related to their subject area and keeping abreast of new developments. A study conducted by Pyrko, Dörfler and Eden (2017:390) introduced a trans-personal knowing process of thinking together. They argue that, without thinking together, CoPs cannot exist. They indicate that thinking together clarifies knowledge sharing and mutual social engagement.

Unisa tutors should find spaces where they could join CoPs dealing with tutoring of the same subject so that they learn from other tutors offering the same subject in other universities or within Unisa in other regions. This initiative will give them advanced knowledge of the subject and be able to respond appropriately to students who read on the topic facilitated and ask questions about the subject.

#### *3.3.1.3.6 Teacher-content interaction (T-C-I)*

This concept focuses on the teacher’s creation of content. T-C-I affords teachers an opportunity to continuously monitor, construct and update course content resources and activities. Anderson (2003:137) argues that the development and application of content objects are an increasingly important component of the teacher’s role in both distance and classroom-based education. With the growing technological usage in DL, teachers are provided with opportunities to create learning objects that are automatically updated by publications, data, and other research-based artefacts. Downes (2004:30) adds:

> “Learning objects are digital materials used to create online courses where these materials are modular, interoperative, reusable and rediscoverable. They are

accessible over the internet through different types of repositories. Learning objects can be accessed by educators and students and assemble viable lessons, units and courses and share them between different institutions and systems."

Wikiversity is an example that supports the concept of T-C-I. Wikiversity is a community devoted to collaborative learning that builds learning resources and links them to internet resources using wiki software, which allows for collaboration. Its participants are continually improving the educational content of Wikiversity's pages because any member of the CoP can edit the content as and when new information is discovered on the subject. Figure 3.3 shows examples of CoPs sites managed by Wikimedia. The inscription on the right hand shows that anyone can edit as long as he/she is a member of the CoP.


**Figure 3.3: Communities of Practice sites**

CoPs also exist at Unisa when staff members of the same directorate or department share the same interests. Spaces are created via Enterprise Content Management (ECM) and, from time to time, regional staff members converge in that space asynchronously and share practices with their members of staff performing the same job. So far, CoPs that have been formed are Human Resource practitioners, Regional Academic Coordinators, Communication and Marketing Managers, Regional Service Centre Managers, Digital Technology Advisors, librarians and student counsellors. This practice has been found to be beneficial for the regional staff and Unisa since it

contributes to the institutional quality management.

#### *3.3.1.3.7 Content-content interaction (C-C-I)*

Relevant content is crucial in the process of teaching and learning, hence Anderson (2008:16) argues that C-C-I is seen as a new and developing mode of educational interaction. According to Anderson (2008:16), content is programmed to interact with other automated information sources to refresh itself constantly and to acquire capabilities through updates and interactions with other content sources.

In short, each type of interaction is unique in nature and has its role within the distance-learning environment (DLE) but some of these interactions may overlap, for example, S-C-I overlaps with S-T-I in that both have a content-centred and academic function. S-T-I overlaps with S-S-I in that both have a social function. Therefore, for interaction to occur successfully there must be human beings interacting with each other and the converging factor is the content. All human interactions should be intentional and focused. In addition, the educational value of interaction depends on whether the type of interaction provided "is most suitable for the various tutoring tasks of different subject areas and for learners at different stages of development" (Moore, 1989:5). Over and above the six types of interaction discussed above, some researchers propose that the seventh dimension of interaction that should be considered is learner-community interaction (L-C-I).

## 3.4 Role of a tutor in distance learning

### 3.4.1 Who are the tutors?

Tutors are part-time instructors, faculty members, graduate students, counsellors, or community liaison persons depending on the institution. "They are content experts who have to cope with a very heterogeneous student group" (Burge, Howard & Ironside, 1991:11). Fröhlich, (2007: xiii) defines tutors as:

> "people, often more experienced than students, who guide the learning process,

> lend a human touch to learning and give the students opportunities for asking questions and for general discussion to enhance the learning process".

Burge et al. (1991:5) define a tutor as person who is a realistically and practically proactive mediator between the programme materials and the students. The definitions above reveal that tutors are content experts who are well experienced in their own fields of study and are tasked with a responsibility to guide students in the learning process by ensuring that students participate in their learning. In the past, tutors were expected to provide knowledge to students, and students were expected to absorb the knowledge given without or with limited critical engagement. However, this type of pedagogy has changed over time and the tutor is no longer viewed as the source of knowledge.

The profile of Unisa tutors includes Unisa Alumni over and above the list mentioned above. The standard qualification requirement to qualify as a tutor at Unisa is an honours degree in the specific field. Some academic colleges also employ well performing students with excellent academic achievements who are currently studying towards a relevant honours degree to tutor first year students.

In most institutions, a tutoring function is provided for undergraduate students. According to Burge et al. (1991:4), the tutor is assumed to be a person in closest contact with the student throughout the course via OL or F2F. He/she engages with students telephonically, online or F2F, gives feedback on assignments and/or examinations, helps students understand the course materials or objectives, is a student advocate with the university, counsels students on personal, vocational or educational problems or refers them to the relevant department that would address the challenge encountered by the student.

Distance educators, however, are concerned that teachers, tutors, advisers and others who help students work through a course may lack the skills and creative insight to adopt appropriate strategies offered by these new classrooms. Shobe (1986:230) challenges DL educators to reconsider how they do things to be able to assist those who are in the frontline of assisting students. In response to the concern raised by

Shobe, institutions make effort to train and develop tutors for them to perform their tutoring work to the best of their ability. For example, Unisa established a strategic Centre for Professional Development (CPD), which focuses on staff training and development. The centre is a collaborative central resource for the Unisa teaching community. It provides access to high quality professional development opportunities focused on the latest trends and established best practices in higher education. Its target group, according to Unisa (2014:3), includes fully employed academic staff, e-tutors, teaching assistants and other professional staff members who provide support related to the enhancement of quality teaching and learning at Unisa. This group of professional staff includes regional staff, librarians and others.

### 3.4.2 How do tutors in distance learning support students?

O'Rourke (2003:39) identifies the four key roles of an ODL tutor. The first is the supportive role, which is a continuing element that sustains students throughout their ODL learning experience. The second role is that of guiding, which requires a tutor to help students to understand the content and its relationship to their learning goals. The third role is that of an enabler, enabling students to develop and apply appropriate learning processes effectively to ensure that they learn productively. The last role is that of an administrator in which a tutor serves as a link between students and the institution on administrative issues.

Tait (2004:100) writes that tutors are central to teaching and learning and should therefore be utilised strategically by institutions of higher learning. Tait (2004:99) claims that a tutor serves as a link between the institution and the student; hence, tutors are involved in marking assignments in some institutions, such as UKOU, and provide feedback that would enhance students' knowledge on the course content. According to Tait (2004), feedback, which is performed by tutors in other institutions, aims to build a relationship between the student and the tutor, which is an important element in student retention. There is no doubt that students expect or need constructive feedback that would enhance their knowledge of the subject (Stevenson, Sander & Naylor, 1996:26).

Students' retention, according to Tait (2004), which is a challenge for many institutions of higher learning worldwide, is another role that is fulfilled by tutors. Retention is also a challenge at Unisa, hence the university has established a unit that deals solely with students' retention and is currently working on the First Year Experience (FYE) project.

In addition to the students' retention role played by the tutor in DLE, Tait (2000:289) suggests that the tutor:

> "performs a cognitive role by supporting and developing learning through the mediation of the standard and uniform elements of course materials and learning resources for individual students. Affective role: providing an environment, which supports students, creates commitment and enhances self-esteem; and Systemic role: establishing administrative processes and information management systems, which are effective, transparent and overall student friendly."

Comas-Quinn, De los Arcos and Mardomingo (2012) conducted a study on the shifting roles of tutors in a virtual learning environment (VLE) in DL. The purpose of the study was to assess the roles played by tutors in relation to teaching and learning of language in DL using web 2.0 technology. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and discussion forums. The authors found that tutors perform four roles, administrative, cognitive, affective and co-learner roles. In comparison with the other researchers above, Seletso (2010:7) uses the term "systematic" to refer to the administrative role of a tutor. However, Comas-Quinn et al. (2012:141) and Tait (2000:289) use "administrative role" to refer to the systematic role. The two groups of researchers agree on the three roles played by the tutor in the DLE while Comas-Quinn et al. (2012) recognise the fact that the tutor is a co-learner in DL. As a co-learner, the tutor understands challenges faced by students in the learning process and this part falls under the affective role of a tutor. This is reflected in figure 3.4

The study by Comas-Quinn et al. (2012:141) provided information about empowering tutors as co-learners for the current study. According to the surveyed literature in this chapter, tutors do not only facilitate tutorials to ensure that learning takes place, they also learn from students during the process of facilitating learning in a tutorial class.

Tutors should therefore be open and embrace the fact that they can learn from students. They need to understand that students bring knowledge and experience to a learning environment and that some of this knowledge is relevant to what they learn Singh, (2014:265) in line with the constructivist theory of learning.

In addition to the above roles performed by the DL tutors, literature reveals another role, which is the e-tutor librarian role reflected in figure 3.4. In a study carried out on the roles of tutors in DL, “current trends in librarianship in higher education have indicated an increasing tutoring role for librarians in the online environment” (Waite, Gannon-Leary & Carr, 2011:129). The study aimed to examine the role of the e-tutor in selected online learning literature before progressing to examine the implications for librarians of fulfilling e-tutoring role in UK universities. The findings of the study were that DL institutions should have e-tutor librarians however the authors conclude that not all institutions can afford such tutors because of the financial demands associated with OL that might prevent the institution from implementing this (Waite et al., 2011:145). The current practice in the implementation of the ITM is that tutors facilitate learning, and the task of guiding students on library activities rests on specialist librarians. Unisa has no tutor librarians, which is a gap that has been identified. The literature by Waite et al. (2011) ensures that ITM meets the needs and expectations of students by suggesting that tutor librarians attend to the needs of undergraduate students specifically since postgraduate students are well taken care of by the college-specific librarians.

Waite et al. (2011:129) indicate that:

> “tutor librarian is an information professional with an important user education role who engages actively with the learning and teaching environment, undertaking teaching, user education, in-service training and staff development roles”.

These tutors are expected to interact with students and facilitate information literacy education F2F or via OL. If training is done F2F, it is convenient because students converge at the venue and training is done practically in the computer labs. However, if support is provided online, the e-tutor librarian should ensure that students have OL

experience because of time constraints and other challenges associated with OL training. An OL information literacy tutorial may be synchronous or asynchronous and may use text-based communication through e-mail postings, chat facilities or sound and visual communication through Web-cams. Table 3.1 displays a model of e-tutor librarian showing the main functions performed by this tutor in DLE.

**Table 3.1: Functions of an E-tutor librarian**

| Name | Function |
|---|---|
| Contextualizing Functions | Hosting (Setting a climate for learning)<br>Demonstrating (Utilizing the medium effectively) |
| Monitoring Functions | Regulating (Establishing netiquette, facilitating discourse) |
| Meta Functions | Responding (Encouraging, acknowledging, or reinforcing student contributions; Confirming understanding through assessment and explanatory feedback)<br>Summarizing (Marking the end of the learning stage) |

Adapted from Feenberg (1989) and Rourke and Anderson (2002).

The model above summarises the role of a tutor in DL. Some of the roles may apply in F2F and online tutoring since, when providing OL library training and F2F, the tutor librarian is expected to do it practically in front of students so that they are also able to do it. The tutor is expected to monitor the task given in class, encourage, acknowledge what students are doing right and confirm their understanding of the functions used during training.

DL tutors also support students emotionally. A study conducted by Kalogiannakis and Touvlatzis (2015) investigated emotions experienced by students through communication with the tutor-counsellor. The main purpose of the study was to investigate the emotions experienced by students of the Hellenic Open University (HOU) and how these emotions vary through interactions with the tutor-counsellor. Data collection was performed via an anonymous questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The findings confirmed that it is important to have tutor counsellors in DL since the learning process may be emotional and tutor counsellors must support students in this area. The study by Kalogiannakis and Touvlatzis (2015) was informed

by the fact that, in the traditional F2F education setting, emotions could be observed as students and tutors engaged through eye contact, tone of voice, posture and facial expressions. However, all these non-verbal expressions do not exist in the context of DE thus creating the impression that DE has no emotions. The function of tutors is to keep contact with students, motivate them and discuss ways of dealing with learning or practical difficulties they might encounter. According to Moore and Kearsley (2012:209), tutors bridge the geographical and psychological distances between students and institutions. The study conducted at HOU by Kalogiannakis and Touvlatzis (2015) reveal that tutors also have a counselling role to play which confirms the current practice at Unisa whereby tutor roles include counselling. Given my experience in the tutor support environment at Unisa, counselling is important especially for first-year students who may not be sure about the qualification they want to study for, how to access additional support and how to study in this type of an environment.

Juutinen and Saariluoma (2010) surveyed 354 students on the emotional barriers raised in an online DL programme. The aim of the study was to investigate interaction in OL platforms from the user's psychological perspective because, according to these authors, there are many emotional aspects in the human-technology interaction processes. The findings of this study reveal that the dominant emotions experienced by students were anxiety, satisfaction, disillusionment and pride. The students' emotional state was found to be directly related to their learning situation to the point where they could get discouraged and drop out. Angelaki and Mavroidis (2013:89) indicate that communication between students and tutors contributes to the alleviation of negative emotions and enhances learning. The more students communicate with their tutors, the less they suffer from stress and anxiety therefore communication is considered as the best pedagogic practice for DL (Aksal, 2009:2).

Ng (2007:3) and Berge (1995:2) agree that tutors perform managerial, social, technical, and pedagogical roles. A tutor performs a managerial and a technical role when she/he manages new students who are using the OL platform or the DL system for the first time. The tutor also needs to build their confidence and solicit active participation

especially if it is a synchronous online tutorial, which is a pedagogical role. By accommodating technical problems that may arise, the tutor is also performing a social role. The pedagogical role is reflected in figure 3.5.

Seletso (2010) conducted a study at the Botswana Open University (BOU) focusing on the role played by tutoring in ODL. The study collected data from ODL practitioners through in-depth interviews to explore different roles that tutors play in ODL. Questionnaires were used to gather data regarding the impact of tutorial services as a supportive learning environment in ODL. Observations were also used to record aspects omitted from the interview sessions and the questionnaires. Seletso (2010) also used Keller's Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction (ARCS) Model of Motivational Design to emphasise how tutoring can create a supportive learning environment and to measure its impact on the learners' academic performance. The main focus of the study was on the role of a tutor in helping learners succeed in ODL.

The finding of the study was that tutors perform a number of roles in ODL. According to Seletso (2010:7), "the role of a tutor in DL is substantially different from a traditional teaching role, in that it is more of a "pastoral" and guidance role, rather than a direct teaching role". Seletso adds that the pastoral role should not be confused with the facilitation role, which is reflected in Figure 3.4. She indicates that there are risks associated with F2F tutor support as students expect to be taught instead of taking part in a facilitated learning environment that is conducive for learning to take place. Students need to understand that the role of a tutor is not to teach but to provide guidance and facilitate learning. Barker (2002:7) adds that:

> "an e-tutor is not immune to the pastoral role in that, this type of tutors is expected to provide pastoral care of students in terms of advising them about careers and course choices, marking student's assignments and coursework and providing feedback on submitted material."

The roles described above are similar to those performed by Unisa tutors. However, Unisa divides the tutors' roles into three parts (Unisa, 2012:9). The first role is facilitation

of learning, which ensures that learning takes place through interactions and through engaging students on content issues. This role may be regarded as a cognitive role as described by Tait (2000:289) and Comas-Quinn et al. (2012:141), while Berge (1995:2) refers to this role as pedagogical. The second is a counselling role, which identifies and deals with students' general problems (Unisa, 2012:11) by assisting them to find ways of solving these problems or referring them to the Directorate for Counselling and Career Development (DCCD). This department deals with personal and academic career issues affecting students which may form a barrier to their success. On the other hand, Seletso (2010:7) clusters the different roles performed by tutors into a single role, namely, a pastoral or guiding role.

The last tutor role is an organisational and administrative role, which requires a tutor to support students to get connected to Unisa systems with respect to module enquiries and tutorial plans. This role is in line with the view put forward by Comas-Quinn et al. (2012:141) and Tait (2000:289) above. Berge (1995:3) separates the administrative role from the technical role because, as the tutor facilitates learning, he/she is required to assist students who are struggling to use the LMS to navigate and participate in the tutorial session. These three roles are reflected in Figure 3.4.

The literature reviewed above shows that tutor support is a critical component of an effective learning environment that will assist DE to deliver the mandate of increasing access and participation in institutions of higher learning. The role performed by tutors at Unisa is changing gradually and there are roles that the ITM model does not mention. Figure 3.4 shows technical and social roles performed by tutors (Berge, 1995:3).

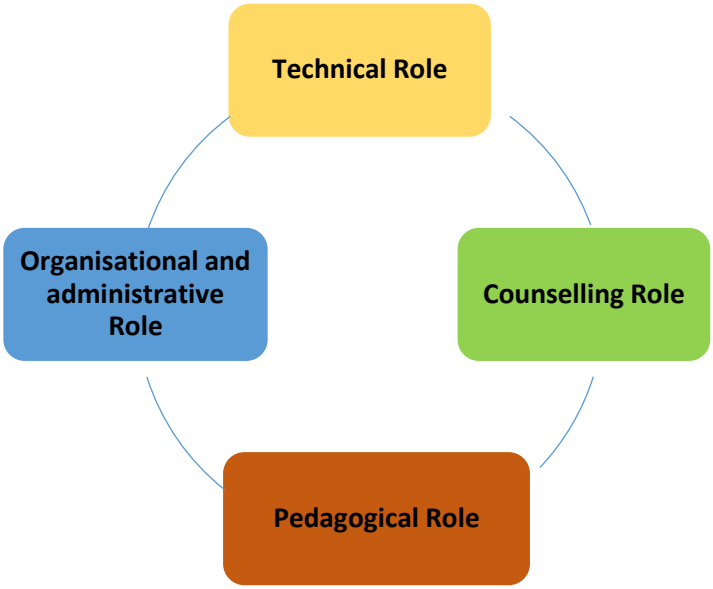


**Figure 3.4: Tutor roles in distance learning described in various literature**

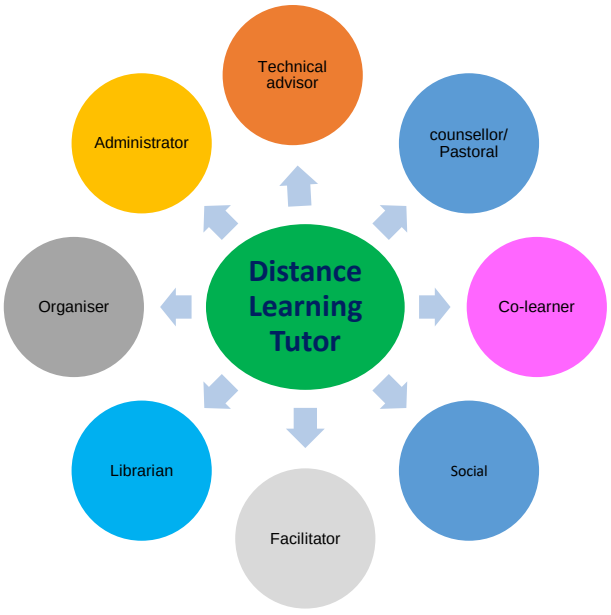


**Figure 3.5: Unisa tutor roles**

## 3.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to review scholarly literature relevant to the topic under research. The concept of tutoring was discussed in detail commencing with its historical developments from the non-governmental organisations to where it is now at Unisa. The discussion of the literature looked into the historical practices associated with tutoring in various countries (Russia, Poland, America, Medieval Europe and Africa) with the purpose of gaining an understanding of how other countries view tutoring. The chapter also discussed the different models of tutoring used at Unisa, the impact of tutoring in the field of DL, the role of tutors, the various types of interactions and how they impact students' access and participation in DL. This chapter explored the key concepts that form the basis of this study in relation to the effectiveness of the ITM to meet students' needs at Unisa. While tutor support is used by students to adapt to DLE, it also presents dynamic challenges that are accounted for in the literature.

# CHAPTER FOUR
# TUTELAGE AND QUALITY EDUCATION

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter extends the deliberations in Chapter Three by reviewing the scholarly literature in the field of tutor support. Higher education has experienced a period of significant expansion over the years. As universities have become larger and more complex, the need for improving quality and aligning programmes with students' needs increases. The discussion in this chapter touches on three key important concepts of the study, quality in DL tutoring, the Africanisation of tutor support and evaluation in DE.

The concept of quality in DL tutoring is discussed with a specific focus on quality assurance in the area of tutoring. Quality is also defined within the context of South African higher education with specific reference to Unisa. The concept of the Africanisation of tutor support in DL is discussed in line with the impact left by the legacy of apartheid in the South African higher education landscape. Comparisons between the Unisa tutor support model and the OU UK tutor support model are considered to determine how the Unisa tutor model was influenced by the OU UK model of tutoring.

ITM is evaluated using a relevant model of evaluation and contextualised to ensure that it responds to Unisa's vision of "The African University shaping lives in the service of humanity" for an African (indigenous) student. The discussion that follows begins with an explanation of the concept of quality in DL. It continues with the Africanisation of tutor support and then the concept of evaluation is discussed.

## 4.2 The concept of quality in distance learning tutoring

The South African higher education system has experienced growth in terms of students' intake in institutions of higher learning. This growth is informed by the government's commitment to transform higher education and ensure that access is provided to all South Africans who meet the requirements of studying in higher education. This growth was expressed by the Department of Education (DoE, 1997:222)

as the intention to “transform higher education through the development of a programme-based higher education system, planned, funded and governed as a single coordinated system”.

There must be a balance between growth in higher education and quality. Growth in students’ numbers without enhanced quality can impact negatively on the institutional reputation. Roberts (2009:13) indicates that while DE institutions increase student numbers quality focus has to increase. A diminished focus on quality together with an increasing focus on numbers guarantees failure in terms of achieving the desired outcomes of an institution of higher learning.

In the interest of striking a balance between growth and quality, the South African government appointed the Council for Higher Education (CHE), which is an independent statutory body, to develop, promote and assure quality systems for higher education. This body is also expected to monitor the state of the higher education system in relation to national policy goals and international trends (CHE, 2015:60). Nationally and internationally, all higher education institutions are expected to implement quality systems. This is set out in the Commonwealth of Learning Quality Toolkit (CoL, 2009). The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) assists institutions of higher learning to provide quality education.

The implications of the foregoing discussion are that it is important for DL institutions to provide quality support to the masses of students who enroll for tutorial programme. Chikoko and Chiome (2013:155) are of the view that quality tutorials are the cornerstone of university business. Unisa provides tutorial support through the ITM. Students do not only expect to be supported, but they expect to receive quality support. One of key features of the Unisa strategic plan 2016-2020 is that it aims to provide quality student experiences. This means that the institution will ensure that students receive tutorial support that would assist them to manage and succeed in their studies. The provision of such tutorials means that planning and implementation should occur within the context in which it operates.

### 4.2.1 Contextualising quality in distance learning

The demand for university education has put tremendous pressure on institutions of higher learning to provide access to university education at a reasonable cost without compromising quality (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2002:3; Mannan, 2009:1). Many universities have transformed due to the introduction of technologies used to facilitate learning. Meyer (2002:20) indicates that technology has enabled many employed people to access higher education for continuous professional development. Single-mode universities have become dual mode universities providing education in line with the demands of the clients that they attract. Contact universities are now offering DL (Middlehurst, 2002:2) in South Africa. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2013:12), Unisa is the only dedicated provider of DE in South Africa but campus-based universities are also now providing DL. The DHET also encourages Unisa to support public and private institutions to widen access for students seeking to study through DL.

Universities need to align themselves with the changes occurring globally so that they remain relevant and are able to compete on a global level (Middlehurst, 2002:1). This should begin with proper planning. According to the DoE (2001) and DHET (2013), when an institution of higher learning decides to provide DE programmes, this should be done with appropriate planning and resourcing so that, during the process of change, quality should not be compromised. For universities to succeed in maintaining quality, they need to align their policies and respond to the demands of their clients. (National Association of Distance Education Organizations of South Africa [NADEOSA], 2003:19).

One of the critical areas in DE is the delivery of quality programmes that can respond to the needs of organisations in the labour market. South Africa had to develop criteria that would govern the process of developing quality standards in DE. This was a team effort that was done in consultation with various stakeholders and relevant interested groups. To achieve quality in DE, it is important to ensure that all programmes are aligned to the criteria developed by the South African DE community. According to NADEOSA (2003:13), quality in DE is guided by students, collaborative relationships, planning and

policy, learner support, quality assurance, human resource strategy, information dissemination, programme development, course design, course material, assessment and results.

DE institutions are expected to know the profile of their current and potential students to provide quality education for them. According to NADEOSA (2003:4), the criteria for DE quality expects student profiling to be done by the provider to assist in the development of policy and the planning of programme development, course design and materials development, student support, and other relevant aspects of educational provision. Unisa responded to these criteria by providing a student profile in the Unisa Annual Report (Unisa, 2016b:10) that was extracted from the final audited Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) and submitted to the DHET.

Collaborative relationships among NGOs and private and public sectors are encouraged by the government for sharing costs, resources and delivering quality education to students (DHET, 2013:41). DHET also refers to cross-institutional collaborative initiatives for the improvement of teaching and learning. It also encourages partnerships for "training new lecturers for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and community colleges, upgrading existing lecturers and providing study opportunities for college management staff". In the interest of cost-effective provision of education and training, collaborative relationships have been formed and collaborative projects are undertaken wherever possible (NADEOSA, 2003:18). For example, the Unisa Report mentions that Unisa signed a partnership with TVET colleges to offer a short learning programme to build capacity and upskill academic staff members of the TVETs (Unisa, 2016:b16). The University of Technology, based in Cape Town, is currently offering F2F tutorials for Unisa students on Saturdays. These activities are responding to the formation of collaborative relationships to share resources and cut costs for the DHET.

Quality could be achieved if policy and practice are aligned to inform systems in an institution. The criteria for DE provision requires an:

> "integrated framework at a policy and practice level that informs a clear cycle of

> planning, implementing, monitoring, reflection and action to ensure that learners and staff needs as well as the needs of other clients are met" (NADEOSA, 2003:19).

Policy is key in ensuring that quality of management systems are developed and implemented by each institution. For this to happen, Mannan (2009:4) advises that the university management needs to commit, plan, build capacity among staff members, set up processes and procedures, establish a student support system and appropriate infrastructure, etc. This process, according to Mannan, is an "embryonic stage" of quality development where foundations are laid to ensure that quality is assured by appropriate systems.

"Student support as reported in many sources breaks down to two components comprising academic support and non-academic support with an objective to help learners learn successfully" (Dzakiria, 2005:105). Without a quality student support system, a DE institution will not be able to achieve its desired outcome as stated in the institutional goals and students might encounter difficulties in their studies.

When students enrol in DE, they are provided with various forms of support ranging from academic support, counselling, administrative support, tutorial support, access to technical support, learning centres, etc. The scope of student support is specified in the Commonwealth of Learning Quality Toolkit (CoL, 2009:71), which indicates its expectations from institutions of higher learning regarding the provision of quality student support. DL is expected to provide support using a "range of opportunities for tutoring at a distance through the use of various forms of technology. Contact tutoring, assignment tutoring, mentoring, counselling, and the stimulation of peer support structures are employed to facilitate their holistic progression."

For Open Distance Learning (ODL) to fulfil its mandate of delivering quality educational programs, functional responsibilities include student administration and registration, course design, instructional design/course materials development, electronic media use, editing, tutorial support for students, monitoring of tutors, counselling, assessment and management of the distance education learning system. Human resources will need to

be developed continuously for these functional responsibilities to be successful.

### 4.2.2 Definition of quality in distance learning

Literature reveals that there is no single definition for quality because it is considered to be a “relative concept” (Harvey & Green, 1993:10) depending on the context in which it is used. Mannan (2009:2) refers to Daniel (2005), who defines quality as an incremental process involving continuous development along with the development of ODL institutions. This means that ODL institutions improve their processes to deliver quality to students.

Harvey and Green (1993) conducted a study through document analysis on “defining quality, assessment and evaluation in Higher Education”. The study examined quality from five different approaches imported from a commercial to a public sector, which are traditional, scientific or expert, managerial or excellence, consumerist and democratic approaches to quality. According to this study, the traditional approach to quality is understood as a product or service that is superior to others, is exclusive and may be costly compared to other products or services and is associated with affordability and status (Harvey & Green, 1993:11).

The scientific or expert approach is expert driven and aligned to levels and standards of acceptability. It is based on the idea of “fitness for purpose, which means that quality comprises the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy a given need” (Harvey & Green, 1993:17). The features and characteristics should be specified, specifications are standards that should be met, and the process of quality assurance is a means of enforcing conformance to standards. The managerial or excellence approach views quality as a measure of customer satisfaction. The organisation’s philosophy states that quality is everybody’s business, which means that all members of staff should prioritise quality in their daily activities. According to Pfeffer and Coote (1991:4), this approach is output driven. Quality, quantity and time spent are key to this approach and are widely embraced by many organisations. Quality is achieved by meeting customers’ requirements. The

consumerist approach focuses on empowering the customer. This approach refers to students as customers or consumers of the services provided. The democratic approach focuses on achieving a common goal in the interest of the community. The findings of this study were that quality is viewed as an exception, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money and as transformative, and that, determining the criteria for assessing quality in higher education requires an understanding of different conceptions of quality that inform the preferences of stakeholders. The study concluded that there are different understandings of quality in higher education and that none are necessarily wrong or right. People involved in quality should adopt a pragmatic approach and be practical about issues of quality when looking at their context. This means that the adoption of the democratic view of quality is necessary in an approach to quality definition and assessment criteria. This study concluded that institutions should adopt a democratic approach to quality, which is multifaceted and involves managers, experts, welfare workers and members of the public. It is guided by three goals, i.e., equity, responsiveness and empowerment. In the context of DE, Unisa in particular, the democratic approach to quality is inclusive as it involves staff members who are fully employed academics, tutors, professional staff, administrators and students. The implications of this study on tutorial programme are that the quality of tutorial offering should be responsive to students' needs and expectations. Tutorials should be properly planned and offered in a way that empowers students and builds them to be independent. The offering of the tutorial programme should also be inclusive in nature ensuring that students in remote areas are able to access this support programme without barriers.

Quality is not incidental but a planned activity that requires proper planning at all levels. For quality to be successfully planned, implemented and monitored by the government and institutions of higher learning, requires commitment and constant attention from all those who are involved in the process (South African Qualification Authority [SAQA], 2000:3; Mannan, 2009:3). The democratic approach to quality management is appropriate for Unisa in the sense that it is all-inclusive. This is explained in depth below.

Harvey et al. (1993) conducted another study on issues of quality. This was a three-year project, which assessed quality in higher education. The purpose of this project was to develop a methodology for assessing quality in higher education to inform policy. Data were collected using questionnaires, which were distributed in 16 institutions of higher learning, in-depth interviews, and an extensive review of documentary material. The study found that the most important criteria to determine quality in higher education were the following:

- The first and highest scoring criterion was adequate physical resources (library, workshops, IT) to support teaching and learning and adequate human resources;
- Students are encouraged to be actively involved in, and given responsibility for, learning;
- Programme has clear aims and objectives which are understood by staff and students;
- Subject content relates to the programme's aims and objectives;
- Students receive useful feedback from assessment (and are kept informed of progress); and
- Students leave with transferable knowledge and skills.

Harvey et al. (1993) assert that quality can be viewed as exceptional, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money and transformative. The exceptional view of quality, according to this view, is linked to excellence, exceeding standards or exceptionally high standards. This approach, according to Harvey and Green (1993), is a traditional view of quality. Harvey et al. (1993:27) posit that the *"*excellence" notion of quality in education focuses on inputs and outputs, for example, the provision of good quality tutorials. In the context of service provision in DL, quality that exceeds standards therefore means providing and delivering excellent tutorial services to support students in their learning journey to succeed. The consistency or perfection view of quality is understood as conformity to standards. This means that quality should meet the standards or criteria stated by the CoL Quality Toolkit (2009). There should be

consistency if quality is adhered to. This approach focuses on processes and sets specifications that it aims to meet. Quality, in this sense, is summed up by the interrelated ideas of “zero defects and getting things right first time” (Harvey et al., 1993:144). Quality, as fitness for purpose, has several definitions. Firstly, quality can be defined in terms of the institution fulfilling its own stated objectives, or mission statement (Sallis & Hingley, 1991; Henderikx, 1992). Secondly, it is about being able to consistently meet the standard that the producer has set for itself (Harvey et al., 1993:144). In this case, quality is judged in terms of the extent to which a product or service meets its stated purpose (Harvey et al., 1993:144). This means that the institution should constantly revisit the mission statement against the service or product it offers to its students to monitor if it lives up to the promise or it is failing students. If this is done, the institution will be in a position to review its processes and improve them since quality is about continuous improvement.

Studies conducted by Sallis and Hingley (1991) and Henderikx (1992) argue that, in the context of higher education, the definition of quality should go beyond merely meeting customer requirements and should be about “delighting” customers. Students should be satisfied because they receive excellent service. Consequently, fitness for purpose identifies quality in terms of the extent to which a product or service meets the specifications of the customer. This approach has the same interpretation as the scientific or expert approach to defining quality as explained by Pfeffer and Coote (1991:3) who agree that quality should speak to the mission statement of the institution in terms of its promises to students. Quality is then judged based on the services or products offered to students. If the institution fails to deliver according to its mission statement, this is a violation of a quality system or non-conformance to the set standards that govern quality in higher education.

The value-for-money approach to quality concerns the financial investments made to ensure that a quality service or product is provided to customers. This means that, when funders give money to institutions of higher learning like Unisa, they expect the institution to be accountable as to how the money was used to provide excellent

service. A level of accountability is expected from the recipient, hence there is financial reporting attached to this approach since institutions of higher learning report to the government on their use of funds. The last dimension of quality, according to Harvey et al. (1993:144), is transformative. They argue that education is not a service for a customer but an ongoing process of transformation of the participant. This leads to the two notions of transformative quality in education, which are enhancing the consumer and empowering the consumer. The transformative approach therefore focuses on transforming the student as a participant. DL develops a student's dependency or autonomy through a student-centred approach to teaching and learning versus a teacher-centred approach. Hence, various support programmes are institutionalised to ensure that students' sense of autonomy is enhanced. Because of the complications encountered in the definition of quality in higher education, the researchers mentioned above adopted a pragmatic approach that recognises the fact that institutions of higher learning may be of high quality in relation to one factor but low quality in relation to another.

From the above discussion, it could be said that Unisa uses a transformative approach to transform a student's approach to learning at a DL institution. It also uses a pragmatic approach to include all participants involved in the service delivery at Unisa to survey the service provided to students and staff members. In using the value-for-money approach, Unisa reports to the DHET on the subsidy it is given to run the institution and the fitness-for-purpose approach responds to the mission statement regarding the service provided to students.

### 4.2.3 Quality assurance (QA) in distance learning

The prerequisite to defining quality (QA) assurance is in the definition of quality itself. There is no assurance without quality (Schindler, Puls-elvidge, Welzant & Crawford, 2015:7). These researchers claim that, just like quality, QA has a number of definitions that have commonalities. They emphasise that quality assurance is a set of processes, policies or actions performed externally by QA agencies and accredited bodies, or even within the institution (Henderikx, 1992; Meyer, 2002; Hopkin, 2004; CoL, 2009; Mannan,

2009; Malik, 2015). These common aspects of defining QA are demonstrated in Figure 4.1

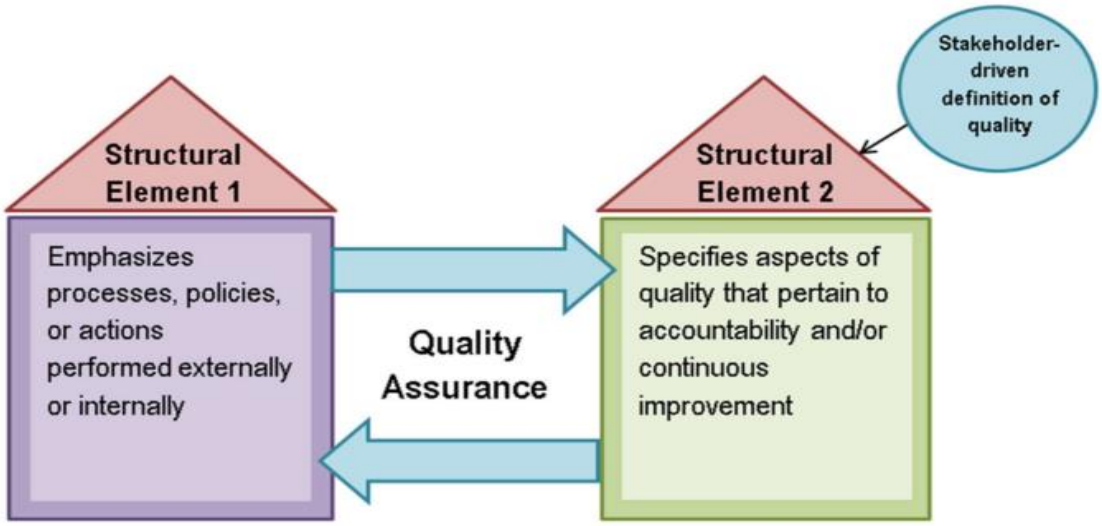


**Figure 4.1: Common structural elements of existing QA definitions**
(Source: Schindler et al., 2015)

To support the afore-mentioned definition of QA, Harvey and Green (1993:19) indicate that:

> "quality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered".

These researchers believe that, for a service or product to be classified as quality, it should have gone through the quality system developed by the institution for this purpose. If mechanisms exist, then quality can be assured. The opposite is also true, i.e., if mechanisms are non-existent, quality cannot be assured. For any DL to assure quality, it needs to put in place a system that will execute this task. In other words, the embryonic stage, as indicated by Hopkin (2004) and Mannan (2009), needs to be fulfilled. The embryonic stage of quality development is the establishment stage of quality where the institution decides how it will respond to the issues of quality as required by the CHE. It is at this stage that the institution develops policies, processes

and procedures that govern the quality of programmes offered.

Quality evolves over time. As the institution grows, QA systems develop and are subject to change. Hence, Mannan (2009:2) refers to Daniel (2005), who posits that quality is a continuous process. Therefore, an organisation or institution continuously improves according to its own definition of quality. Perfection, according to Harvey et al. (1993:144), simply means meeting the set standard of quality. The above position suggests that QA is a flexible system that, according to SAQA (2000:5), allows for multiple pathways to the same learning ends. This means that flexibility varies from institution to institution because of the activities or tasks that shape DE learning (Mannan, 2009:2). Henderikx (1992:37) believes that each institution needs to define its level of flexibility in its offering that is dependent on financial limitations or organisational factors. “It then has to define very clearly the range of flexibility it can offer and on which points” (Henderikx, 1992:37). Hence, Hopkin (2004:191) refers to the evolving stage of quality development to accommodate such flexibility in the systems.

Nsamba (2015:32) indicates that QA emerged in the late 1990s through the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and the Council for Higher Education (CHE) quality committees. These committees work with agencies to ensure that QA principles are promoted in institutions of higher learning throughout the country. Institutions are required to evaluate themselves and provide self-evaluation reports during the external process of evaluation, which is carried out by HEQC on behalf of the DHET in South Africa.

Institutions are not on the same level of QA implementation and growth. Hopkin (2004) conducted a project study on “Frame factors and a quality assurance agency in an ‘embryonic’ higher education system”. This was a case study which aimed to explore how the operational milieu of an External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA) impacts on its role and function. Assessment visits were used as a method of data collection. The case study found that “the less mature the higher education system is, the easier it is to install integrated quality assurance processes and measures” (Hopkin, 2004:191). This means that institutions that have poor QA systems have a high chance of being

developed and implement quality systems that would allow them to enhance quality in the institution. Hopkin (2004:191) categorises the development of QA into three different stages in ODL institutional development, namely, “embryonic, evolving and matured stages”. The embryonic stage of quality development is the establishment stage of quality where the institution decides how it will respond to the issues of quality as required by CHE. It is at this stage that the institution develops policies, processes and procedures that govern the quality of programmes offered. Hopkin further argues that for the development and implementation of QA, policies should be in line with the stages of institutional development.

Quality, just like any other system, requires a buy-in from the implementers within the institution. Members of staff within the institution are expected to implement quality systems, which are planned and developed during the embryonic stage (Mannan, 2009:3). According to the CoL Quality Toolkit (CoL, 2009:11), the participation of staff from across the institution in the analysis of the processes and outcomes promotes a common understanding of and commitment to achieving institutional quality goals. The staff involved in promoting quality within the institution require training in the implementation of the quality concept for successful implementation (CoL, 2009:11).

There is no clear definition of QA at Unisa. However, from Unisa (2012), QA could be defined as a process for ensuring a quality learning experience for students, intrinsic value to all stakeholders, effective structures and processes that are aligned to the revised policies and institutional plans and strategies, as aligned to HEQC. Unisa’s definition agrees with the definition of Harvey et al. (1993:19), who claim that, for quality to be assured, mechanisms, processes and procedures should be put in place. According to Hopkin (2004:182) QA is an evolving and flexible process that aligns with policies, plans and strategies. This means that QA is not static but has a dynamic character as informed by the changes in the institution.

In the case of Unisa, academic, administrative and professional staff members are involved in the implementation of quality. Staff members are capacitated to develop and implement systems, which enable them to implement and monitor quality within their

departments. Department Planning and Quality Assurance (DPQA) assists all departments within the institution to run quality promotions and ensure that quality is embedded in their planning and is properly implemented, managed and monitored. According to Henderikx (1992:34), quality in education is more than meeting the expectations of customers as it is essentially related to the orientation of the university as expressed in the mission statement. Quality is also related to customer satisfaction. The customers, in the case of higher education, are students. Customer expectations form an essential element of quality assurance. This study gave Unisa students an opportunity to share their views regarding the quality of tutorials they receive as a support service. The researcher is of the view that students who receive the service should inform the institution of the best practice within the program. Learner-centeredness should be a focal point regarding best practices and a “culture of care” should be part of best practices in ODL.

## 4.3 Quality within the Unisa context

At Unisa, quality is embedded in its operational culture and is part of the institutional business. Policies, processes, procedures, systems and mechanisms have been put in place to manage quality within the institution. The DPQA was established and given a mandate by the institution to facilitate, encourage, support and advocate sound planning at all levels of the institution, cultivating a planning culture and ethos to facilitate the inculcation of an integrated quality management and planning regimen throughout the institution (Unisa, 2012:6).

The Quality Assurance Directorate resides under the ambit of the DPQA. Its mandate is to enable Unisa to fulfil its QA obligations internally and externally. This directorate prepares Unisa for regular institutional quality audits conducted by the HEQC. It also oversees the internal programme evaluations for all the academic programmes at Unisa to obtain programme accreditation. Through QA, Unisa gets an opportunity to collaborate with similar departments in other institutions at regional, national and international levels with the purpose of sharing information, benchmarking and learning

from other institutions. Internally, DPQA facilitates the establishment of QA committees in colleges, schools and departments to oversee QA and management matters.

The quality systems are guided by the quality criteria standards and performance indicators as explained in the CoL Quality Toolkit (CoL, 2009). It should be noted that there are criteria that guide student support and tutoring falls under the ambit of student support.

### 4.3.1 Quality in tutoring

Unisa provides guidance on how students should be supported using a variety of student support programmes. Tutor support falls under the student support programme of the institution. Tutorials are cited as a "teaching and learning method that seeks to transform and enhance student support and provide opportunities to interact with others as well as research activities" (Unisa, 2008a:1; 2012:3).

Unisa uses a blended learning approach to tutorial offerings. Unisa's (2008:2) ODL policy defines this type of offering as a teaching approach that:

> "is accomplished by using multiple teaching and learning strategies, a range of technologies in combination with face-to-face interaction and the deployment of both physical and virtual resources".

Daweti (2003:7) indicates that F2F tutorial classes should be of the highest quality because they are "an opportunity which is not always offered by DE providers". According to Daweti (2003), F2F tutorials contribute to students' decisions to join an education course. Furthermore, a study by Sulcic and Sulcic (2007:209) found that good quality online tutoring support service can improve part-time students' study outcomes. Criterion 7 of the CoL Quality Toolkit (CoL, 2009:71) indicates that students are important customers of institutions of higher learning; this criterion looks at the scope governing the tutor support service:

> "Learners are supported by the provision of a range of opportunities for tutoring at a distance through the use of various forms of technology. Contact tutoring;

assignment tutoring, mentoring, counselling, and the stimulation of peer support structures are employed to facilitate their holistic progression".

Student support consists of 15 broad criteria to evaluate different areas of student support, including tutor appointment, peer and social interaction, development of independent learning, academic and technical staff facilitation of learning, access of tutorials, tutor training, staff training, programmes, processes, progression, retention, feedback and feedforward, and staff work efficiency. One of the frameworks or standards to guide the evaluation of student support services in DE in South Africa is the HEQC criteria for quality student support. Nsamba (2015:32) notes that these criteria approach quality from a broad perspective and therefore fall short of addressing the needs of individual DE students. The CoL Quality Toolkit specifies the following criteria standards and performance indicators to assist institutions to manage quality in their operations:

- Real two-way communication;
- Various technologies for tutoring at a distance, contact tutoring, assignments and stimulation of peer support structures;
- Students are encouraged to create and participate in communities of learning in which an individual student thinks and solves problems with others engaged in similar tasks. This is facilitated through a range of student support mechanisms such as peer support sessions, tutorials/contact sessions, teaching on assignments and support in the workplace, e-mail and internet communications;
- Student access to technology that is relevant for the programme/course is facilitated and students are shown how to use the technology for learning and communication;
- Students' performance is monitored and students at risk are identified;
- Timeous educational interventions are provided for such students;
- There are systems to organise and monitor the decentralised support for remote learners – grouping of learners, allocation of tutors, location of suitable sites of

learning close to where the learners live/work and monitoring of attendance of tutors and learners; and

- The tutor/student ratio is sufficiently small to enable tutors to know their learners.

The above criteria standards and performance indicators show institutions what is expected from them as they provide tutoring services to students. Although the CoL Quality Toolkit sets the criteria, the context and the uniqueness of each institution is considered during the QA process (HEQC, 2002:3).

The provision of tutorial support at Unisa should be provided within the African context to fulfil its vision of serving humanity. The discussion that follows presents the Africanisation of tutorial support at Unisa from the South African perspective.

## 4.4 Africanisation of tutor support in distance learning

In reflecting upon where South Africa currently finds itself, the impact of the legacy of apartheid should not be underestimated. This legacy has produced social, economic and education inequalities (Soudien, 2016:1) that occur when equals are treated unequally, when unfair practices are carried out and are regarded as fair even though they are wrong and immoral, in some cases (Van der Berg, 2005:2). For example, during the apartheid era, white people in South Africa had more privileges than other races and such practices were constitutional and acceptable to the government of the time. White people received education of high standard, they were paid better salaries than their black counterparts and they had their own schools and universities that were better resourced than those of other races. Mhlauli, Salani and Mokotedi (2015:205) note that the government ensured that these practices were regulated by policies to protect the rights of white people only. In an attempt to resolve the disparities in higher education, the new democratic government brought about a number of changes, for instance, DoE (1997:14) indicates that one of the democratic government's objectives is to promote "equity of access and fair chances of success to all, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequities and that education should be provided within a Southern African context.

Given the commitment made by the democratic government, the higher education curriculum and student support services should consider the contexts from which South African students come and promote the lived experiences of these students. This includes the design and provision of tutor support that enhances success, reduces dropout rates and increases retention, which is currently a challenge in many institutions of higher learning in South Africa (Moodley & Singh, 2015:98; Higgs, 2016b:96). Unisa is making a concerted effort to support its students through providing tutorial support. Hence, this study evaluates tutorial support based on the problem stated in Chapter One. The discussion below focuses on the issues on the Africanisation of tutor support in DE by taking the African worldview of students into account.

### 4.4.1 The concept of Africanisation and its issueness on tutor support in distance education

Makgoba (1997:199) defines Africanisation as "a process of inclusion that stresses the importance of affirming African cultures and identities in a world community". Makgoba (1997:1) explains that Africanisation is also a process of defining or interpreting African identity and culture. It is formed by the experiences of the African diaspora and has endured and matured over time from narrow nationalistic intolerance to an accommodating, realistic and global form. This definition emphasises, firstly, inclusion and, secondly, African cultures and identities. Gumbo (2016b:102) provides a definition, which explains Africanisation as a process and a way of life. The process is expressed through the normal social and cultural practices that govern societies. Collins Dictionary (1999, sv. 'process') defines a process as a series of actions, or a series of natural developments which result in an overall change. In the light of the above, Africanisation can be conceptualised as a series of actions, which are carried out naturally for a period of time to produce different results. Educationally, these results could be the developmental outcomes of students who have found meaning in the services that they received during the process of their learning.

Makgoba's and Gumbo's definitions both view Africanisation as a process with reference to the life of Africans as African worldviews were excluded from South African

educational practices leading to exclusion from institutions of learning. The democratic government has made it its national agenda to ensure that higher education curriculum is transformed to include knowledge, philosophies and practices of the black community. The recent student uprisings on #FeesMustFall were accompanied by their call for decolonisation of the curriculum, showing the need for transformation. Historically, the curriculum used in institutions of higher learning was predominantly designed from a western perspective to the exclusion of African knowledge and philosophies. The curriculum had and still wears a western identity, to some extent. As a result, it became a norm that Africans are denied opportunities to showcase their perspective of practices and experiences in the curriculum and in teaching and learning. Higgs (2016a:1) argues that:

> "despite the advent of decolonization, African education systems mirror colonial education paradigms inherited from former colonial education systems and as a result, the voices of African indigenous populations are negated."

Gumbo (2016b:105) asserts that western culture has dominated the African way of life and this practice occurred at the expense of "indigenous culture". This dominance gave western culture an unfair advantage that has been reviewed by the new democratic government as Higgs (2016b:92) explains: "the apartheid system of higher education was profoundly inequitable, and this has been addressed since 1994". According to Higgs (2016b:92), equity in the context of higher education refers to more than just access:

> "It involves access to a variety of academic fields and disciplines, to postgraduate study, and to opportunities and outcomes in general, in all fields and disciplines, and at all levels of study."

In the context of the academic support system, equity refers to access to a variety of tutorial support systems that enhance learning leading to increased success for students. One of the objectives stated by the DoE (2001:6) is that it intends to develop a system of higher education that will:

> "promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities".

Most, if not all institutions of higher education, have student support programmes for students entering the system because the South African education system demands that student support should form one of the mainstream programmes in higher education that contributes towards the full development of each student (DHET, 2017:7). South African universities therefore have to develop a model that would support students considering their schooling background and where they live. Unisa can serve as a guideline for transformation in other institutions.

There is a great need for the tutor support programme to be Africanised to provide relevance to the culture of African students. Shockley (2008:2) holds that a "Eurocentric approach means that the system has the tendency to be sufficiently concerned with the intellectual and communal forward progress of only the majority population". On the contrary, in South Africa, the Eurocentric model is only concerned about the minority. The socio-economic background of students should inform the design of a model that can assist students to learn with limited or no barriers at all. Even though universities are trying to implement this, more efforts need to be directed to increasing access for students to participate in the tutor support programmes designed to enhance their success. Kobayshi (2002:6) emphasises the fact that DL involves increasing access to education through transcending the barriers of geography that separate the teacher from the learner.

The ITM is influenced by the Open University of the United Kingdom (OU UK) tutor model, which suggests that it might not have been transformed enough to suit the African students' contexts. Established in 1969, OU UK strived to develop various support systems. One such support system was the tutor support that, according to Tait (2003:3), made students choose to study with this university. According to Shale (2010:96), OU UK targeted the population of students who had been excluded by the very limited opportunities for university education and adults who had not even

considered acquiring higher education but provided them with a chance to earn a degree". Given the fact that many of these students work and study at the same time, the university had to establish a strong student support base that would assist them to cope and succeed in their studies. The OU UK tutor support model is:

- cognitive (supporting and developing learning);
- affective (related to the emotions that support learning and success); and
- systemic (helps students to manage rules and systems of the institution in ways that support persistence)

(Tait, 2000:289).

Over and above the key elements of tutor support above, Tait (2003:3) provides the following characteristics of the tutor support at OU UK:

- There are 13 regional centres and 260 study/learning centres where F2F tutors engage with students for support.
- All students have the opportunity to be linked to a personal tutor at a ratio of 1 tutor to 25 students.
- All students have access to a personal tutor counsellor who performs an affective role.

The cognitive part of the tutor support focuses on the teaching and learning as the tutor engages with students face-to-face physically or online using a computer-mediated communication. The affective part of the tutor support model focuses on the emotional aspect of a student who needs support in terms of advice and the personal tutor counsellor focuses on this role.

The following similarities are identified between the OU UK tutor model and the Unisa tutor model:

- They use tutors to facilitate learning;
- They provide F2F and online tutor support;

- F2F tutors are based in regional hubs and learning centres; and
- They have various roles to play, i.e. the cognitive, affective and systematic roles.

Differences are also noted between these two models. While both universities expect tutors to play an affective role to support students, in the OU UK model, a tutor counsellor is appointed to take care of the affective support in addition to a personal tutor who plays a cognitive role. At Unisa, the tutor plays both cognitive and affective roles (Unisa, 2012:11). When the affective part needs a specialist, the student is referred to a counsellor who goes deeper in the area of counselling. At OU UK, only 25 students are connected to a personal tutor while at Unisa 200 students are linked to an online tutor and 40 to 60 students are linked to a F2F tutor (Unisa, 2012:12).

The researcher's analysis of the two models shows that the OU UK model has influenced the Unisa tutor model. The OU UK model has been in existence for many decades, which gave it a chance for refinement. It has integrated technology in the tutor system which enhances independent learning. Unisa is finding it difficult to keep up with the standard of the OU UK tutor model because of differences in contextual and cultural backgrounds. The OU UK model has used a blended provision of tutor support because its infrastructure allows for such a provision, unlike Unisa's tutor support model which started by providing F2F support and only recently started using the blended tutor support system.

The OU UK tutor model provides support to students a majority of whom are considered to be digitally literate since they come from the first world country where technology is built into the educational system but the Unisa tutor model supports students who may encounter technology for the first time when they study in DL. According to Hague and Payton (2010:14), digital literacy education was introduced in European schools during the introduction of the National curriculum in 1988. Since then, the policy on education was used to drive the integration of technology in schools. For technology to be fully integrated in the school curriculum, it needs a strong bandwidth infrastructure and affordable internet access for its users to limit internet access challenges. This is

evident in the study carried out by Davies (2015:1) that shows that although basic bandwidth is available to all Europeans, progress still needs to be made on reaching the goals for coverage and take-up of fast and ultra-fast broadband, according to the digital agenda for the Europe 2010-2020, which indicates that:

- by 2013, internet access should be available to all Europeans;
- by 2020, fast internet should be available to all; and
- by 2020, 50% of households should subscribe to ultra-fast broadband.

According to Davies (2015), the first goal has been achieved and good progress has been made towards the second and the third goals.

These goals stated above allowed the OU UK to develop and implement its tutor programme as internet access is not a major problem unlike in Africa where issues of bandwidth and cost of access to internet are still a challenge for students who come from indigenous contexts and cannot afford internet access costs (Venter, 2003:1). Unisa therefore needs to look at the challenging issues around the implementation of ITM.

Venter (2003) conducted a study on the optimisation of the internet bandwidth in developing countries for higher education. The purpose of the study was to find ways of enhancing the flow of information within and between countries, especially those with less developed systems of publication and dissemination (Venter, 2003:5). Issues of bandwidth were highlighted as one of the challenges that impact on higher education in developing countries. The findings of the study were that bandwidth costs in African countries are ten times more expensive compared to their European or North American counterparts. According to this researcher, these costs impact negatively on the tutor support programme because the interaction between tutors, students, content and interface do not occur as expected since students cannot afford data. The study recommends that governments make the bandwidth a priority and join forces with other academic institutions to negotiate better connectivity deals with the providers. South Africans are currently staging protests, called #DataMustFall, that advocate for the

reduced costs of data. These campaigns have caused the Paratus mobile data provider in Namibia to reduce its pricing by 80% (Duncan, 2018:26). The economy in European countries allows the OU UK to invest in technology for online tutoring and for a low tutor-student ratio of one tutor to 20 and 25 students on average in comparison with Unisa, which has a high tutor-student ratio of one tutor to 200 students (Unisa, 2012:12; Thorpe, 2002:113).

The above analysis and comparisons reveal that the implementation of each model should take into consideration the context and culture in which it operates. It is thus important that Unisa tutor model be implemented by carefully considering the South African context to respond to the type of students that it serves.

#### 4.4.1.1 What does Africanisation of tutor support mean for Unisa?

The tutoring programme used at Unisa uses a blended approach that combines F2F and OL to support students. According to Unisa (2008:1):

> "blended learning is accomplished by using multiple teaching and learning strategies, a range of technologies in combination with face-to-face interaction and the deployment of both physical and virtual resources".

The blended approach to tutor support was developed with a purpose of breaking barriers to learning and reaching out to students who could not participate in the F2F student support programme provided by the university. The profile of Unisa students is diverse and includes employed and unemployed students, students who study part-time or full-time, that come from both urban and rural areas, are of all ages, are digitally literate or illiterate and may be either rich or poor. Poor students may not be able to afford to pay their fees and purchase prescribed books and this impacts negatively on their studies. Some students who are studying on a full-time basis come from rural areas where there are no resources to assist them in their studies. Many of them have limited financial resources that prevent them from travelling to the university to contact their lecturers for proper guidance therefore they rely on F2F tutor support.

Tutors are independent contract personnel employed by the university on a part time basis to support students in their studies. They represent primary lecturers who are responsible for the modules that they tutor to students. Most tutors have never met with the lecturers, be it F2F, by e-mail, telephonically or in any other platform used by Unisa to communicate with its stakeholders. Lecturers do not know if the tutors represent them well nor whether they guide the students in the way that the lecturers wish them to do. Limited support, if none, is provided to tutors for them to execute the work they are appointed to do as tutors in an online platform or F2F.

The student profile discussed above also impacts on the ITM. Thus, evaluating the ITM can assist the university to relook into its current model so it can create a more conducive environment for DE students. Such a model should have proper support that recognises the students' contexts and their way of life or culture. The current Eurocentric model used at Unisa to support students is mostly meant for those who can afford and have appropriate resources to access tutorials.

The ITM was designed with a technologically resourced (first world) student in mind, who also has good schooling background, who preferably comes from an urban area and can access resources. For instance, Unisa established learning centres in some parts of the country in various provinces. However, the learning centres and regional hubs are located in urban areas and still require rural students to travel long distances to access the F2F tutors. What complicates this problem further is that, even though these centres are located in the cities, some are under-resourced in the sense that they do not have internet access to interact with online tutors and other students. The language of teaching and learning is English.

The use of technology for a student who has a good schooling background is not a challenge because such a student enters the university in possession of digital skills unlike a student who comes from a technologically deprived schooling background and struggles with the language of technology for learning. Given the researcher's experience in the area of student support and her observation in the field of tutorial support, this model may be one of the contributing factors to the exodus of students

from rural areas to the cities in search of better educational environments where they will get F2F tutors, good internet and computer access.

The DHET (2012:7) indicates that black students from poor communities “have found themselves having to fit in with a system which was designed for students from relatively privileged backgrounds”. This practice continues to perpetuate injustice and fails the transformation efforts. The western culture continues to dominate the African culture in the educational sphere as indicated by Gumbo (2016a:105) and Msila (2017:49). Soudien (2010:8) documented that, by 2025, South African universities should increase their participation rates from 15% to 20%. This can only happen if students are provided with proper support systems, which include tutor support that speaks to their needs, cultures and contexts.

Unisa’s vision is “The African university shaping futures in the service of humanity” (Unisa, 2016a:4). Unisa promises to provide programmes to African students from an African perspective, context and worldviews. However, the tutor support remains a challenge as its approach does not respond to the promise Unisa makes to students. The model identifies high-risk modules and offers F2F tutor support for these modules only while the rest are offered online. Online tutor support has its own challenges for students with poor schooling backgrounds coming from rural areas. The approach used in the ITM is that tutoring is optional for all students, but this is a challenge for students with poor schooling backgrounds, a lack of transport to the tutorial venues, access to internet and financial difficulties. Firstly, these students do not know about this type of support and, as a result, they do not connect with their online tutors or with their F2F tutors. If they do connect with the tutorial support, their barriers prevent them from participating regularly to reap the benefits of the tutoring programme.

The current study contributes to an Africanised tutor model that responds to the students’ needs. Experience and observation suggest that the current tutor model perpetuates the marginalisation of African students because the infrastructure provided does not address the students’ backgrounds and contexts. Students are still expected to travel to cities to access tutor support and resources which does not reflect or satisfy

Unisa's vision that is guided by the principle of student-centredness, which upholds the fact that students are at the centre of learning and that every decision made by the institution will consider students first since they are the first customers of the university. This kind of commitment challenges Unisa to revisit its vision and mission and to realign its planning and deliverables to transform tutor support as promised. This study makes a contribution to the scarce body of knowledge on the aspect of Africanising tutor support to enhance learning for Unisa students.

#### 4.4.1.2 Transforming tutor support through socialisation

Student-centredness, as explained by Unisa (2008:2) in its ODL policy, is understood in the following manner:

> "Students are seen as the main foci of the educational process and they are supported to take progressive responsibility for their learning and research. However, the pedagogy employed should enable successful learning through rich environments for active learning, establish links between students' current meanings and contexts and new knowledge to be constructed, and encourage independent and critical thinking".

This explanation suggests that students' needs should direct the university's objectives, particularly when it comes to support related issues, with an intention to build autonomy and a culture of social learning among students. Unisa is aware that this culture should be enhanced by establishing environments that are conducive for learning. A conducive learning environment for a DL student includes creating learning spaces that allow social interaction where students meet as small groups, interact with the content, one another and the interface. African students learn best when they come together and share their understanding and experiences. This is part of an African communal culture that embraces socialisation because that is how Africans live – they share knowledge, experiences and even food. This is called the Africanisation of learning.

Students studying in DL institutions come from all walks of life, within the African continent and outside Africa, because Unisa also accepts students from outside Africa

although African students are in the majority (Unisa, 2016b:4). These students have different backgrounds and are socialised differently. However, their social skills play a role in their learning environments because they are expected to interact with their tutors and other students. The tutor support should thus ensure that students learn through socialisation. An Africanised curriculum recognises the fact that learning spaces for socialisation and engagement are created for students to engage with one another and the content. Waghid (2004:36) refers to the African(a) philosophy of education as promoting a human activity that creates space for people to engage deliberatively.

The term “deliberate” means that students’ engagement is formalised, planned and intentional. When spaces of engagement are created in conducive environments, students can socialise, interact and learn from one another. Msila (2017:53) supports this argument, indicating that the African philosophy “is inherently inclusive in approach and there is always a belief that everyone can bring something to the village”. If this argument is brought into the educational environment, it means that all students have something to offer in the educational process. Their experiences serve as a point of departure and can be linked with new knowledge to assist them to understand the world and the new concepts introduced to them. Ally (2008:39) also indicates that DLE should be designed in a way that enables learners to interact within their contexts to personalised information and construct their own meaning. Unisa has created spaces for social engagement online and F2F. However, this should be expanded, not only in urban areas but in rural areas and informal settlements to reach all its students.

Online environments were established to connect students globally, while F2F platforms connect students in a single physical venue. Chikoko (2016:76) asserts that the advent of technology has enhanced interconnectedness among people and countries. Similarly, Kop and Hill (2008:39) refer to Siemens’ theory of connectivism, which argues that the learning process is cyclical, in that learners connect to a network to share and find new information. This assists them to modify their knowledge based on new learning and then connects to a network to share these realisations and find new information once more. This process, according to these authorities, occurs in an online environment.

Universities have taken advantage of technology to enhance distance teaching and learning but these learning spaces cannot function without human involvement. Even though students socialise independently of a tutor in most cases, tutors do go into these spaces, monitor the engagement and provide guidance when required. Tutors who facilitate learning should be trained to fit into these learning environments.

#### 4.4.1.3 Capacity building for Africanising tutor support

Tutors who facilitate the learning of students in ODL should be trained as capacitated staff are able to execute their duties. The training programme should include dealing with diverse students such as students with little or no technology knowledge, unprepared students, and those with low self-esteem and should include how tutors should respond to various challenges encountered in their F2F or OL support programmes. The tutors should recognise that, when students enter the university, they come with experiences and from different cultures, and the tutors should possess skills on how to merge the students' experiences with the current knowledge facilitated in a tutorial session. By so doing, the tutor would be embracing inclusion as stated by Makgoba (1997:1), when he emphasises that Africanisation is a process of inclusion. A DL support programme, like tutor support, is meant to transform societies by eliminating limited or unequal distribution of resources.

Institutions of higher learning in DL face capacity constraints in terms of human resources. Some institutions of higher learning have established regional learning centres with an aim of providing access to black communities to redress the injustices of the past. Poor human and infrastructural resourcing is prevalent in rural centres. Even if they exist, they do not meet the needs of students because they are under-resourced. The shortage of tutors, most particularly in some disciplines such as science and technology, and lately African languages as well, is an added challenge in the implementation of the ITM at Unisa. The poor remuneration of tutors, according to Ntuli (2016:88), has been found to be another cause for the lack of human resource capacity.

The inability of the African educational system to properly address the educational

needs of the black community is one of the most perplexing problems in South Africa today. A growing group of black scholars and practitioners called "cultural reattachment Africentric educators" believes that black students need an African culture-based education that is focused on their particular learning needs (Shockley, 2008:1). According to this researcher, it is clear that African students from the black community have different needs from those of white counterparts or wealthy communities in urban environments. Therefore, the type of support they need will differ from their white counterparts. The discussion that follows will focus on the concept of evaluation.

## 4.5 The concept of evaluation in distance education

The evaluation of educational programmes is considered an important action for educators (Stavropoulou & Stroubouki, 2014:193). Throughout the history of education, a variety of methods and models of evaluation have been developed and used to evaluate educational activities in DE and in schools. According to Owston (2008:606), previous evaluation models were longitudinal in nature however, with changes in the educational arena, evaluators developed models of evaluation suitable for current practices. A longitudinal evaluation involves a lengthy period, e.g. three years. To understand evaluation, this study starts by defining the term evaluation and putting it into context.

Levine (2005:43) defines evaluation as a process that consists of the merging of three powerful ideas, i.e., the collection of information, the comparison of that information and the placement of value of that comparison. Levine's definition is very close to Vey's (2005:viii), who defines evaluation as a process that involves three activities, i.e., collection, comparison and drawing a conclusion about an issue under evaluation. Vey adds that evaluation is the making of statements about the quality or value of assessment tasks and looks at a broad range of evidence to encourage students and assessors to reflect on the process of learning and the product of that process. It is an on-going process of measuring progress against expected learning outcomes at particular stages. These two authors' definitions put an emphasis on three aspects, i.e.,

process, product and the quality thereof. The quality of the product under evaluation is measured based on the information collected as evidence through a data collection process. Bloom (1956 cited in Bloom et al., 1971), Levine (2005) and Trochim (2006) believe that evaluation entails using determined criteria and standards to assess the value of systematically acquired information regarding accuracy, effectiveness, economic efficiency or satisfactory outcomes, either quantitatively or qualitatively.

This study defined evaluation as a process of collecting information on the effectiveness of the ITM using pre-determined criteria and standards, analysis and interpretation thereof against the set determined by Unisa, and against other models, to improve the ITM's effectiveness to service students who use this programme. Based on the above definition, for evaluation to occur, pre-determined criteria and standards to evaluate the ITM under study were set to assess the information gathered regarding the effectiveness of the tutoring model used at Unisa. During the process of evaluating the ITM, information was collected from various sources. It was compared with other forms of tutoring models and what Unisa claims to offer through its ITM and a conclusion was drawn.

### 4.5.1 Purpose of evaluation

Evaluations provide relevant feedback to stakeholders. The above definitions state that evaluation of programmes is done for assessing their value to the organisation and checking if they meet the needs of its clients. McNamara and O'Hara (2010:550) note that the goal of any high-quality evaluation is to:

- measure learning – find out who has learned what;
- assess progress – find out whether objectives have been met;
- improve the quality of the programme – reflect on what is happening and plan further developments;
- enhance accountability – demonstrate results to funders, managers and colleagues within the organisation;

- communicate results – to those directly involved, to colleagues within the organisation, and to wider audiences; and
- build up a body of evidence of effectiveness – to understand what works (and in what ways) in a variety of contexts.

Programme evaluation could also be done to find out what is working and what is not working for the institution. The evaluation of the ITM will improve the quality of the programme and plan for further developments, enhance accountability among all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the programme and share the results with the Unisa community, most particularly with the stakeholders. This evaluation process will also enable the users to engage with evaluators and recommend what could work on the programme. The next section looks at the models of evaluation in relation to this study and identifies a model of evaluation that could be used to evaluate the Unisa ITM.

### 4.5.2 Models of evaluation in relation to the study

In the history of programme evaluation, a number of models of evaluation were developed to address different needs. Owston (2008:606) notes that the development of programmes of evaluation was objective driven, i.e., focused on determining the extent to which a programme met its stated objectives and nothing else. This type of model was advocated by a number of scholars including Tyler in the 1930s until, in the 1970s, researchers began to review Tyler's evaluation model and developed one which went far beyond Tyler's. Owston (2008:606) refers to Scriven (1972) who argues that evaluators should also consider evaluating the outcomes of the programme and not only focus solely on the objectives of the programme since both are equally important for programme development.

Wang (2010:131) describes three types of programme evaluation models, the Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) model, the Outcome-Based Evaluation (OBE) model and Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation. Each is discussed subsequently.

### 4.5.3 The CIPP model of evaluation

Wang (2010:131) defines the CIPP model as a management-oriented model of evaluation designed to provide definitive and valid information for decision making for people in business settings and in management. The model assists decision makers to take sound decisions guided by the framework. Furthermore, Stavropoulou and Stroubouki (2014:195) note that the model has also been used for accountability purposes as it represents a rationale for assisting education institutions to be accountable for the decisions they made in implementing various programmes. The CIPP evaluation model is made up of four components illustrated in Figure 4.2, which are Context, Inputs, Process and Product. Zhang, Zeller, Griffith, Metcalf, Williams, Shea and Misulis (2011:63) refer to this model as Stufflebeam's CIPP model of evaluation. According to these authors, the model can guide the programme's needs assessment and planning, monitor the process of implementation and provide feedback and judgement of the programme's effectiveness for continuous improvement. The underlying theme within the CIPP framework asks four fundamental questions (see Figure 4.2). These are: What needs to be done? How should it be done? Is it being done? Did it succeed?

Context evaluation is the first pillar of the CIPP evaluation model and it assesses needs and identifies problems and opportunities within a defined environment. In this evaluative activity, users of the programme define and assess goals and later reference assessed needs of targeted beneficiaries to judge a programme, course of instruction, counselling service, teacher evaluation system, or other enterprise (Owston, 2008:607; Wang 2010:131). Wang (2010:134) indicates that context evaluation goes beyond context definition in that it incorporates the identification of the audience and its needs as well as the comparison of the programme's intents with stakeholder requirements. Zhang et al. (2011:63) document that the context evaluation component assesses the overall environmental readiness of the programme, examines whether existing goals and priorities are in line with the needs of the recipients of the programme, and assesses whether the proposed objectives are sufficiently responsive to the assessed

needs.

Input evaluations assess competing strategies and the work plans and budgets of approaches chosen for implementation; they aid evaluation users to design improvement efforts, develop defensible funding proposals, detail action plans, record the alternative plans that were considered, and record the basis for choosing one approach over the others. According to Wang (2010:135), input evaluation is conducted as a means of putting support systems, solution strategies and procedural designs in place for the programme. Stavropoulou and Stroubouki (2014:196) suggest that input evaluation looks at the resources of the programme. In other words, this component is resource driven, hence, the evaluator needs to establish the available resources that can assist the programme to be implemented with success and limited barriers. Wang (2010:145) argues that organisations that are passionate about programme evaluation allocate sufficient time and resources to the implementation and are driven by the institutional goals rather than rules and regulations. The researcher is aware that programmes fail because of a lack of resources or limited resources provided to run the programme with success.

The process evaluation activity, according to Stavropoulou and Stroubouki (2014:196), needs to answer the question: How well is it being done? In other words, this component monitors, documents and assesses the activities carried out in the programme. Zhang et al. (2011:63) agree, indicating that, over and above the monitoring of the process, potential procedural barriers are identified for the need to project adjustments. Wang (2010:135) also notes that this activity in the evaluation process is a means of implementing and refining the programme's design and working procedures. This stage presents an opportunity for the programme users to air their views on how the programme can be improved. Hence, Wang (2010:135) advocates a high level of interaction between evaluators and various stakeholders, which include decision makers and any other personnel familiar with the objectives and outcomes of the programme under evaluation. Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007:331) warn that the most fundamental tenet of the model is "not to prove, but to improve" therefore all the

activities performed at this stage should be focused on improving the programme, and this purpose is aligned to quality.

Product evaluation (end-result) identifies and assesses short-term, long-term, intended and unintended outcomes. They help evaluation users maintain their focus on meeting the needs of students or other beneficiaries; assess and record their level of success in reaching and meeting the beneficiaries' targeted needs; identify intended and unintended side effects; and make informed decisions to continue, stop, or improve the effort. This is the last element of the CIPP evaluation model. According to Wang (2010:135), product evaluation refers to the ultimate decision associated with the fate of the programme. This decision may include continuation, termination, modification or refocusing of the programme. An important question at this stage is: Is it worth keeping the programme? (Owston, 2008; Wang, 2010; Zhang et al., 2011). According to Zhang et al. (2011:66), the main purpose of this activity in the CIPP evaluation model is to ascertain the extent to which the needs of all the participants were met. It is observed that the needs of the recipient of the programme and the product evaluation components in the first pillar of CIPP evaluation, i.e. context, converge since this component answers the question asked in the first component of this evaluation model.

The afore-mentioned researchers note three purposes of the product evaluation. Firstly, to provide the summative information that can be used to judge the merits or demerits of the programme, secondly, to provide formative information that can be used for continuous improvements in the programme for future implementation and lastly, to provide insights on the programme’s sustainability and transportability, i.e., whether the programme can be sustained long-term, and whether its methods can be transferred to different settings.

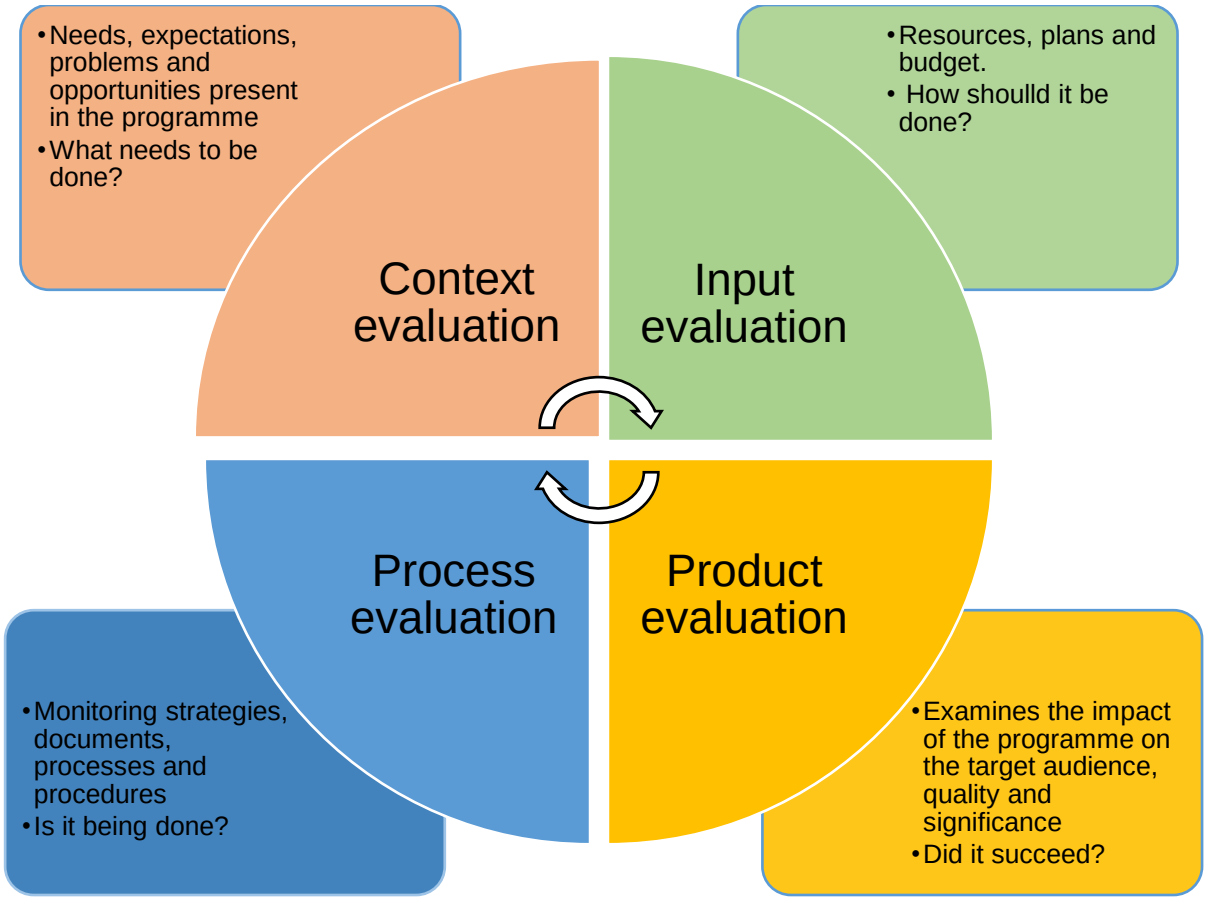


**Figure 4.2: Stufflebeam's CIPP model of evaluation**

### 4.5.4 Outcome-Based model of evaluation

Delgado (2007:159) defines Outcomes-Based evaluation as a type of evaluation that looks at the impact, benefits or changes for clients, students, teachers, etc. Its purpose is to assist the evaluator to find out if the programme activities are achieved as planned. Outcome-Based Evaluation is also a method of evaluation that is based on a programme logic model; the measurement of the success of a programme relies on the measurement of several components of the logic model system. Wang (2010:144) differentiates four types of evaluation that are commonly used in programme evaluation, which are programme evaluation, effectiveness evaluation, impact evaluation and policy evaluation. Programme evaluation uses either person-referenced or organisation-referenced outcomes to determine whether the programme is meeting its desired

outcomes. It answers the question: What is my programme producing in its service to recipients? This evaluation involves three steps. The first is the programme just establishes a baseline established by the outcomes that are currently being used. The next step ascertains the desired outcomes, which must be measured for performance and consumer appraisal in the areas of satisfaction. Lastly, the evaluator needs to explain how the institution should align its services to the desired outcomes. This type of evaluation calls for the organisation to embrace change management and instil a new culture that will align with institutional goals, objectives and outcomes. Consequently, the institution must be willing to develop a monitoring system that will assist the realisation of its goals.

The effectiveness evaluation reports the extent to which a programme is meeting its goals and objectives. This type of evaluation is used to compare the planned programme' s goals with its achieved outcomes, report the programme's performance and value outcomes and provide formative feedback information for programme change and improvement. According to Wang (2010:145), effectiveness evaluation is similar to programme evaluation; the only difference is that the former establishes a comparison condition against which accountability and outcomes can be judged.

Impact evaluation studies whether or not a programme has made a difference for its stakeholders compared to an alternative programme. It answers the question: Is my programme better than others? It also gives stakeholders feedback in the areas of accountability and improvement plans. This type of evaluation needs an evaluator to have a comparison group with which to compare outcomes. The evaluator must look at the people served by each programme, the services rendered by each, and the outcomes and then determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the results.

Finally, policy evaluation, according to Wang (2010:147), investigates the equity, efficiency or effectiveness of policy outcomes for a programme. It strives to answer the question: Does this policy work? Wang (2010:147) explains that policy evaluation is made up of four steps:

- It describes the goals of the policy, analysis of intent and its content;
- The evaluator must analyse the intended outcomes in reference to the stated goals;
- The focus should be on the interaction between the policy and the groups the programme impacts;
- The goals are then fitted into their respective cells by identifying key factors and the status of the anticipated outcomes must be evaluated; and
- The evaluator will provide feedback to the key evaluation players.

Just like in the CIPP, when using policy evaluation, stakeholder involvement is crucial since its input will solve a number of problems in the organisational system.

### 4.5.5 Kirkpatrick's Model of evaluation

Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation is used to evaluate training programmes (Aryadoust, 2017:153). Over and above evaluating training, Owston (2008:608) suggests that this model is also used to analyse the results of educational programmes and is probably the best evaluation model in the business sector. Aryadoust (2017:152) posits that this model could also be used in the educational sector to evaluate students' performance at the end the programme or while they are still active in the programme. It takes into account any style of training, both informal and formal, to determine aptitude based on four levels of criteria (see Figure 4.3).

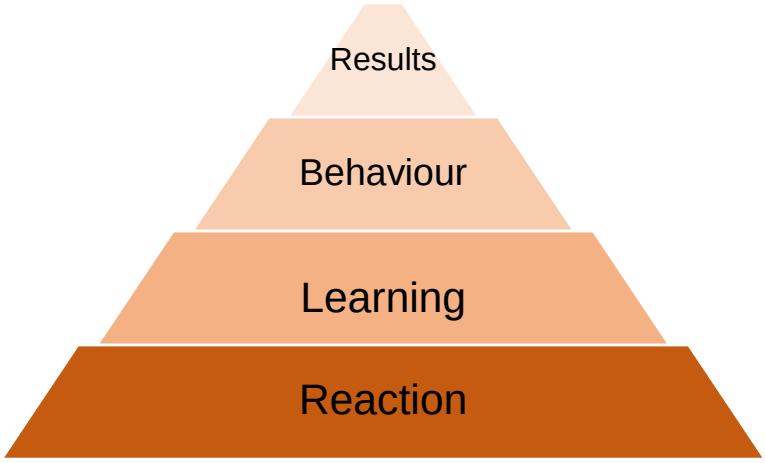


**Figure 4.3: Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation**

In a study carried out by Praslova (2010) on the adaptation of Kirkpatrick's four level model of training criteria to the assessment of learning outcomes and programme evaluation in Higher Education, four criteria of Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation were identified, which are shown in Figure 4.3. These levels are reaction, learning, behaviour and results. The four criteria are divided into internal and external categories. According to Praslova (2010), the first two levels, reaction and learning, are considered internal because they focus on what occurs within the training programme. The last two criteria, behaviour and results, focus on the changes that occur after the implementation of the programme and are thus considered external criteria.

Reaction criteria focus on the perception of the students after they have interacted with the programme. Students usually respond to this criterion through the evaluation of the programme when they provide feedback. Stavropoulou and Stroubouki (2014:199) refer to this criterion as a level of reflection. According to Owston (2008:608), this criterion refers to the participants' satisfaction with the programme. The practice of many educational settings is that, after the presentation of the learning programme, an opportunity is given to the participants to evaluate their level of satisfaction regarding the programme. The surveys can be paper-based or online.

Learning is the second internal criteria of Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation and this criterion focuses on how the students have changed after going through the programme. The questions that should be answered by this criterion are: To what extent has the attitude of participants changed after they have attended the training? What knowledge, skills and attitudes have improved by attending the programme? According to Owston (2008:608), surveys, tests and examinations are used to measure this kind of change. Recently, the use of portfolios is another means of testing if learning has occurred.

Behaviour, as an external criterion, refers to the extent to which participants' behaviour changes as a result of attending the course. To assess this, the evaluator must determine whether the participants' new knowledge, skills or attitudes transfer to the job or another situation, such as a subsequent course. This means that the students will be expected to show what they have practically learnt in the programme rather than the theory only. Praslova (2010:221) terms this transfer of knowledge "job outputs". For example, the student in higher education is expected to apply Module 1 knowledge in Module 2 to demonstrate the impact of what was learnt previously.

The result is that the last external criterion focuses on the long-lasting changes to the organisation that occurred because of the course, such as increased productivity, improved management or improved quality. In the higher education environment, this criterion refers to students' performance after their graduation which means that it focuses on the job output, service to society, etc. According to Praslova (2010:221), this criterion benefits the student by acquiring the qualification, knowledge, skills and competencies to function and the society that will receive the service as a result of the programme.

## 4.6 Strengths and limitations of the models of evaluation

Every model of evaluation has its strength and weaknesses. The discussion below looks at the strengths and limitations of each model. It also looks at the appropriate model for this study. The strength of the CIPP model of evaluation is based on the fact

that it has been used in guiding educators in programme planning, operation and review as well as programme improvement. This module was found to be useful by many institutions of learning including institutions of higher learning globally.

The strength of the CIPP model lies in the fact that it is a well-established model with a long history of applicability since it was developed during the 19th century. The main purpose of this model is to provide a sound evaluative framework to service both decision-making and accountability needs (Stufflebeam, 1971:21). The model is flexible in the sense that it was not designed with any specific programme in mind; thus, it can be applied to multiple evaluation situations. Different organisations and institutions use the model to evaluate their programmes. In education, the model is used to guide educators in programme planning, implementation and review. Finally, the model provides a sound evaluative framework to service both decision-making and accountability needs (Stavropoulou & Stroubouki, 2014:196). The CIPP model is a powerful tool for making and implementing decisions and for post hoc accounting for those decisions and actions (Stufflebeam, 2003:2).

On the other hand, Stavropoulou and Stroubouki (2014:196) state that this model has been criticised for the difficulty of measuring and recording context and input. In addition, the model becomes difficult to work with due to the decision-making process required to put the model into practice and the inability of participants to evaluate their own actions.

Tunc (2010) used the CIPP model of evaluation to evaluate the effectiveness of Ankara University Preparatory School programme through the perspectives of instructors and students. Data were collected through various methods from students and instructors involved in the programme. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data from 406 students attending the preparatory school in the 2008-2009 academic year and 12 instructors teaching in the programme participated in the study. Data from the questionnaire were analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analysed through content analysis.

The results of the study indicated that the programme at Ankara University Preparatory School partially served its purpose. The findings reveal that some improvements in the physical conditions, content, materials and assessment dimensions of the programme were required to make it more effective. By means of this study, the researcher's ultimate aim was to suggest relevant adaptations and contribute to the improvement of the preparatory school curriculum.

Another study carried out by Zhang et al. (2011) used the CIPP model of evaluation to guide the planning, implementation and assessment of a tutor service-learning project. This model was used to guide the conception, design, implementation and assessment of service-learning projects and provide feedback and judgement of the projects' effectiveness for continuous improvement. The focus of the study included how the model effectively addressed service-learning standards for quality practice. Finally, the research illustrated how the model could be used in the application and evaluation of the tutoring project for teacher-education service learning.

Prior to data collection, a task team was formed which assisted with the process. Quantitative and qualitative methods of research were used in the study. Data were collected through various platforms, including interviews with faculty members, document analysis within the faculty of education, focus groups, surveys and observations of tutoring sessions. The results showed that the pre-service teachers who were involved in the project demonstrated more diligence and better quality than the teachers who were not involved in the service-learning project. Another finding indicated that at-risk readers benefited from the project through increases in reading ability, self-esteem and self-perception of themselves as readers, as well as improved attitudes toward reading.

Another study by Hakan and Seval (2011) researched the development, reliability and validity of the CIPP model of evaluation. The purpose of this study was to determine the validity and reliability of the evaluation scale developed by the researcher based on the principles of Stufflebeam's CIPP Evaluation model within the context of the evaluation of the English curriculum of Yildiz Technical University. Cluster random sampling was

used to collect data from 415 students from all university faculties using a five-point Likert scale. Data obtained via the scale were transferred to the computer and calculations were made using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 13 programme as the statistical technique. For data analysis, means, frequency and standard deviation of the opinions of the students were found. The statistics obtained were transferred into tables by grouping and then interpreted accordingly. The results reveal that the scale called the CIPP Evaluation scale is a valid and reliable curriculum evaluation instrument that can be used in the field of education.

Three researchers, namely, Sancar Tokmak, Baturay and Fadde (2013) conducted a study on the application of Context, Input, Process and Product Evaluation models for evaluation, research and redesign of an online master's programme. The purpose of the study was to evaluate and redesign an online master's degree programme consisting of 12 courses from the informatics field using a CIPP evaluation model. Research conducted during the redesign of the online programme followed a mixed methodology in which data were collected through a CIPP survey, focus group interviews, and open-ended questionnaires. According to the findings, approximately 60% of students indicated that the course did not fully meet their needs. Based on these findings, the programme managers decided to improve this course and a focus group was organised with the students studying this course to obtain more information to help in redesigning the course. The course was modified based on the data collected through this process; students in the course were sent an open-ended form asking them what they thought about the modifications. The results indicated that most students were pleased with the new version of the course.

The aim of a study conducted by Derya and Bulent (2016) titled "Application of context input process and product model in curriculum evaluation" was to evaluate competence-based curricula designed by means of internal funding through Stufflebeam's CIPP model. A case study was used as a research design. The data were collected from 622 call centre agents using a professional competence development curriculum's CIPP evaluation scale developed by researchers. The statistical analysis of the research was

conducted by applying the SPSS. The scoring was done focusing on the dimensions of the CIPP evaluation scale, and the significant variations by gender and education background were observed between the opinions of the participants. The results showed that the scorings focused on the CIPP model's context, input and product aspects varied by sex, and that females made a lower scoring than males as stereotypes in relation to sex are also very effective on the thinking styles. Another finding was that there was no significant difference between the visions of the females and the males in the process aspect of the CIPP model. The last finding was that the scoring focused on the CIPP aspects varied by training area. The verbally trained students scored the soft skill learning environments appropriate to their thinking and learning styles higher than the equal weight supporters have.

The overall impression in all studies discussed above using Stufflebeam's CIPP model of evaluation is that this model has the potential to guide organisations and institutions of higher learning to gather evaluation data at each stage of a programme to inform the institution and organisation concerned. This will assist in making informed decisions to sustain or improve the programme.

The Outcomes-Based model focuses on the results of the programme. The strength of this model is that it benefits the client more than the programme itself. It looks at what is gained by the client and whether the needs of the client are met by the activities performed by the institution. The gap identified by the researcher in this model of evaluation is its one-sidedness. Its single-sided approach does not consider the programme under evaluation. Consequently, the programme may miss out on the development opportunities even though there are flaws in the programme under evaluation. Lastly, the evaluation process overlooks flaws that may contribute to the client's needs not being met. Since the ITM would need to be enhanced by identifying gaps and addressing them through this study, the Outcome-Based model may not be the most appropriate model for this study as it will not be useful in addressing the objectives stated in this study.

Criticisms of Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation suggest that the component of learning,

which is considered as the internal criteria in the model, does not measure any learning that takes place so that moving to level two is important. Recommendations for level two include the use of a before-and-after approach so that learning can be related to the programme. Another criticism of this model is that the evaluation of behaviour or level three of this model is more difficult. According to McNamara and O'Hara (2010:551), it may be possible to appraise performance before and after the programme or to have a post-training appraisal three months or more after the programme so that participants have an opportunity to put into practice what they learnt. The fourth or results level is the most difficult area to evaluate effectively. This level defines results to include an institution's capacity to learn, change and develop in line with its stated agreed objectives.

This model of evaluation was not appropriate for evaluating the ITM since it mainly focuses on the programme and sidelines the users of the programme. Its emphasis is on the aspect of training rather than both, i.e., the users and the programme. In support of this stance, Dubrowski and Morin (2011:409) argue that Kilpatrick's model of evaluation puts too much emphasis on the training programme, rather than devoting attention to both programme and stakeholders; it predominantly focuses on learning outcomes, specifically successes and failures, thus answering the question: What was or was not learnt? Rather than: Why was it or was it not learned? These criticisms comprise the shortcomings related to the Outcome-Based models that do not consider the context, relevant inputs and processes leading to the success of the programme. The researcher is of the view that for a model to be successfully evaluated, both users and programme should be taken into consideration by evaluators and that the full picture will assist evaluators to be well informed from all perspectives to take the right decisions about the programme. Based on the above, Kilpatrick's model was not considered for ITM evaluation in this study.

Stufflebeam's CIPP evaluation model was adopted as a framework to systematically guide the evaluation of the ITM and provide feedback and judgement of the model's effectiveness for continuous improvement. This model was appropriate for this study

because it can address and respond to the research questions. The first component of Stufflebeam's evaluation model was used to address the needs and expectations of Unisa students using the ITM model. Problems and opportunities were the areas of focus in this component.

Input, as the second component of the model, evaluated the resources provided to the ITM programme to ensure effective and efficient delivery to students. These also included resources provided to assist students to access and participate in the programme thereby responding to the research question related to access and participation. For any organisation to run successfully, it needs resources. This component therefore evaluated the physical resources, i.e., tangible facilities used in the ITM, human resources in terms of relevant staff with skills and knowledge for ITM implementation, and technology resources. Other elements within this component that were considered were the strategy and plan for the implementation of the programme.

The third component is the process, which was evaluated looking into the processes, procedures and monitoring strategies to identify the gaps that slow down the implementation of the programme. Issues of quality were also examined to ensure that quality was not compromised. The last component focused on the product itself, i.e., if it is helping Unisa students to meet their needs and expectations. This component informed the university of differences that the ITM is making as a learning support programme. It should be noted that quality runs throughout all the components of the CIPP model and thus was reflected in all the stages as reflected in Figure 4.4.

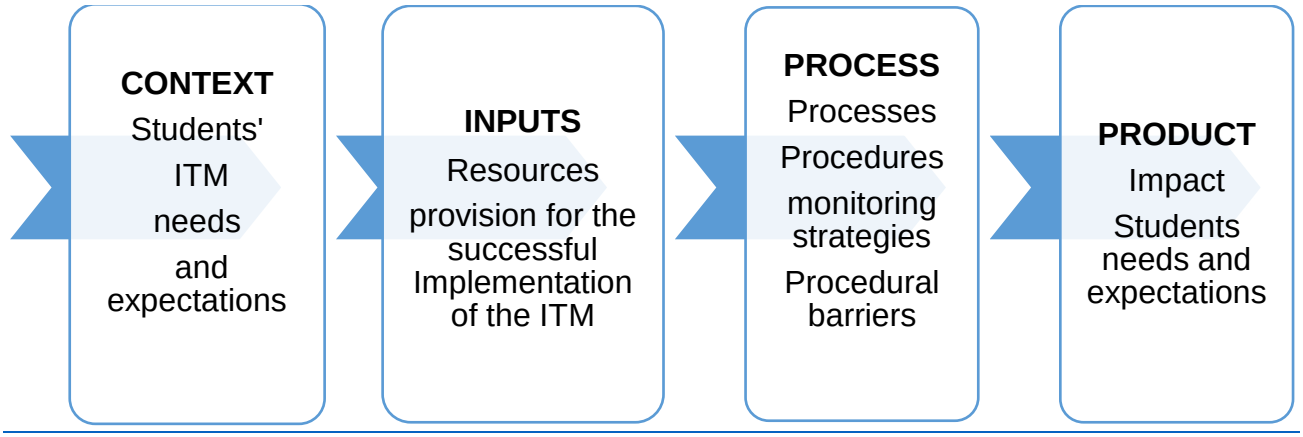


**Figure 4.4: CIPP evaluation process**

**Table 4.1: Criteria for the evaluation of ITM**

| Dimension | Attributes | Brief explanation |
|---|---|---|
| **Context**<br>Owston (2008)<br>Wang (2010)<br>Zhang et al. (2011) | • Students' needs<br>• Students' expectations<br>• Gaps<br>• Opportunities | • ITM meeting students' support needs and expectations (feedback, access to tutors, quality of tutorial classes, availability of tutors, guidance on learning, assignments, exams, bridging the gap).<br>• Needs of rural students.<br>• Challenges in the ITM implementation.<br>• Opportunities in the ITM implementation. |
| **Input**<br>Wang (2010)<br>Stavropoulou & Stroubouki (2014) | • Planning<br>• Resources<br>• Quality | • Strategic objective addressed by ITM.<br>• ITM implementation plan.<br>• Availability of resources (venues, workforce, technology and budget).<br>• Quality personnel (workforce) who have appropriate knowledge and competence (regional staff, tutors, lecturers, academic staff).<br>• Technology (computers, VC equipment, user-friendly online platform).<br>Physical resources: ODL compliant venues, online platform and systems. |
| **Process**<br>Stufflebeam & Shinkfield (2007)<br>Wang (2010)<br>Zhang et al. (2011)<br>Stavropoulou & Stroubouki (2014) | • Processes<br>• Procedures<br>• Potential procedural barriers<br>• Monitoring strategies<br>• Quality | • Effectiveness of the tutor recruitment, appointment and role clarification among stakeholders.<br>• ITM Communication systems.<br>• ITM implementation of quality. Are they effective?<br>• ITM monitoring systems of the ITM provide quality feedback.<br>• Tutor evaluations and evaluation of the activities performed by tutors online and face-to-face. |
| **Product**<br>Owston (2008)<br>Wang (2010)<br>Zhang et al. (2011) | • Students' needs and expectations<br>• Impact of the programme | • Students have access to tutors, systems and participate as expected by Unisa ITM.<br>• Difference made by the programme. |

## 4.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to review scholarly literature relevant to the topic under research. The chapter discussed the concept of quality in DLE tutor support within the context of Unisa with specific focus on quality assurance of tutor support activities. For quality tutor support to be beneficial to students from Africa, it needs to be aligned to the African culture and practices. As a result, literature on the Africanisation of tutor support was discussed to assess if the tutor support used at Unisa meets the expectations and culture of an African student as embedded in the Unisa vision. The key concept of this study was based on evaluation therefore the concept of evaluation was discussed. Various models of evaluation were presented and, because the present study used the CIPP model of evaluation as a framework to evaluate ITM, a summary of other studies related to the same model was presented. However, special attention was given to studies aimed at the evaluation of academic programmes.

This chapter explored the key concepts that form the basis of this study in relation to the effectiveness of the ITM to meet students' needs at Unisa. It can be realised that while tutor support is needed and used by students to adapt to DLE, it also presents dynamic challenges that are accounted for in the literature.

DE practices evolve given the changing environment in which they function. The theories of learning in this space guide the practice in DE. It is therefore important to understand the theories of learning that inform each research area. The chapter that follows describes the theories that guide the evaluation of the effectiveness of ITM in the context of Unisa.

# CHAPTER FIVE
# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

## 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the integrated tutor model (ITM) in the context of the University of South Africa (Unisa). Chapter One began by orientating the study by providing its background, exploring the concepts associated with the tutor support programme, presenting the problem statement, accounting for the significance of the study, the scope and the limitations of the study. Chapter Two discussed theories that underpin this study. Chapters Three and Four reviewed the literature with regards to tutoring in distance learning (DL). Chapter Three discussed the historical developments of tutoring in DL, followed by a comprehensive discussion of the concept of tutoring in DL. It then concluded the discussion by presenting the role of a tutor in DL which touched on how tutors support students in DL. The literature review continued in Chapter Four and discussed tutelage and quality in DL. The concept of quality and the Africanisation of tutor support in DL was also discussed in depth in Chapter Four.

The current chapter discusses and motivates the research design, methods and procedures employed in collecting and analysing the research data for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the ITM. This is done to provide answers to the research question: How effective is the ITM in meeting students' needs in teaching and learning at Unisa? The chapter further accounts for the trustworthiness of the study and issues pertaining to ethics in research. The next section provides a brief discussion on the sites where the study was conducted.

## 5.2 Sites of the study

Unisa comprises six regions distributed across seven provinces of South Africa (Gauteng, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, North West and Mpumalanga). These regions include Gauteng, Midlands, North Eastern Region,

Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape (see Figure 5.1). The study was conducted at these service sites of Unisa.

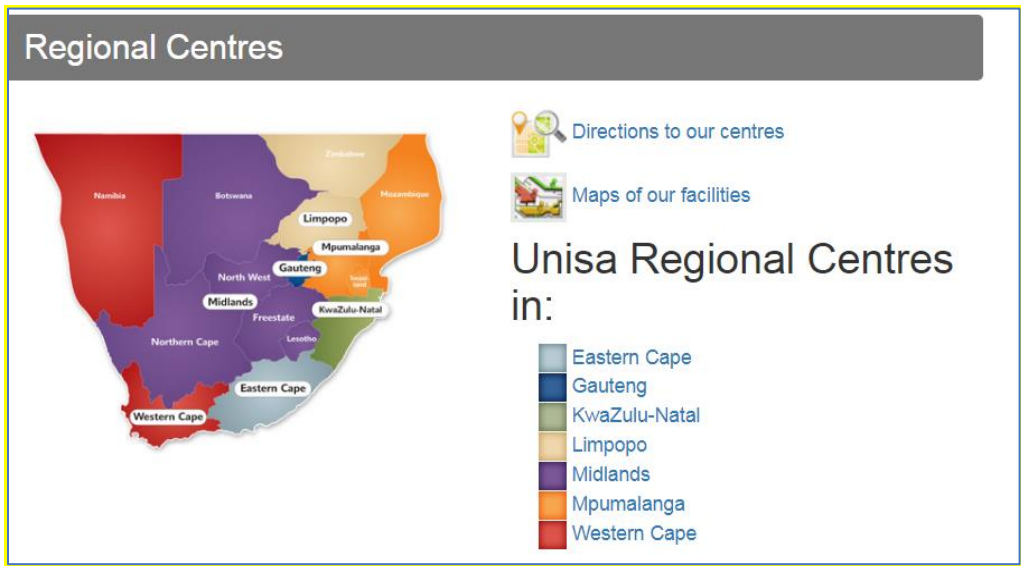


**Figure 5.1: Regional centres of Unisa**

Each region has a regional hub, Regional Service Centres (RSC) and agencies. Gauteng Regional hub is located at Sunnyside in Pretoria (less than one kilometre from the main campus of Unisa) and it also includes the four RSCs, i.e., Johannesburg, Florida, Ekurhuleni and Vaal. Most student activities happen in the Gauteng region because of its proximity to the Unisa main campus. North Eastern Region comprises a regional hub based in Polokwane in Limpopo Province, one RSC based in Nelspruit and three agencies, Middelburg, Makhado and Giyani. Unisa established the sixth region, which is in Nelspruit, Mpumalanga. This region services students in Mpumalanga Province, Eswatini and Mozambique. However, due to the slow growth of students in these areas, Unisa merged this region with Limpopo in 2015 and it was renamed North Eastern Region. KwaZulu-Natal Region has one regional hub based in Durban, one RSC based in Pietermaritzburg and three agencies based in Richards Bay, Newcastle and the Wild Coast. Midlands region has one hub based in Rustenburg, North West Province and four RSCs based in Bloemfontein, Mafikeng, Potchefstroom, Kimberley

and Kroonstad. This region also does not have an agency since the RSCs provide the menu of services. Eastern Cape Region comprises one regional hub based in East London, one RSC in Mthatha and one agency based in Port Elizabeth. Western Cape is the smallest region with only one hub based in Parow and one agency in George. In total, there are 26 Unisa service sites across South Africa.

## 5.3 Target group for the study

Unisa student support community is made up of various stakeholders, namely, student support service centre staff based in the 26 regional service centres, hubs and agencies as described in section 5.2, academic staff members based in the seven colleges, i.e., College of Human Sciences (CHS), College of Education (CEDU), College of Science and Technology (CSET), College of Economic and Management Sciences (CEMS), College of Accounting Sciences (CAS), College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES) and College of Law (CLAW).

The staff providing the services comprises lecturers, Academic Support Coordinators (ASCs), College Tutor Coordinators (CTCs), Tuition Managers and Human Resource Administrators (HRAs). The regional staff members involved in the implementation of the ITM are Heads of Facilitation of Learning (HFLs), Regional Academic Coordinators (RACs) and Tutorial Officers (TOs). Both academic and regional staff members were chosen as target groups because they have been implementing the programme since its inception and they were able to provide information that assisted the researcher to answer the research questions.

Tutors are contracted to Unisa for a period of a year to facilitate learning through the ITM programme. These tutors come from all walks of life however the majority are based in South Africa. Their employment at Unisa is based on the fact that they meet the minimum requirements to facilitate learning in an Open Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) environment such as Unisa. The ITM uses new tutors as well as veteran tutors who are experienced in the field of tutoring. Majority of the target groups mentioned above have had several years of tutoring and therefore they were in the best position to

furnish the researcher with the information needed to answer the research question of this study.

The last group is students who use the ITM support programme during their DL journey. Students are from all the regional service centres, regional hubs and agencies. Some of these students are labelled as “full time” since they are available during the day and use the Unisa regional centres for studying and to access the support services available to them. Other students are “part time” since they study and work at the same time. The students were chosen because they use the ITM by attending F2F tutorial classes in the regions and access their e-tutors online to receive support for their studies. These students were in a better position to provide answers to the research question.

## 5.4 Research paradigm (ontology, epistemology and axiology)

### 5.4.1 Defining a paradigm

Bogdan and Biklen (1998:22) posit that a paradigm is “a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research”. Cohen and Manion (1994:38) define a paradigm as the philosophical intent or motivation for undertaking a study. MacNaughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford (2001:32) define a paradigm by using three elements, a belief about the nature of knowledge, a methodology and the criteria for validity. In support of MacNaughton et al. (2001), TerreBlanche and Durrheim (2002:49) argue that the term “paradigm” refers to a research culture with a set of beliefs, values and assumptions that a community of researchers has in common regarding the nature and conduct of research. Goduka (2012:126) posits that a paradigm is the “entire constellation of beliefs, values and techniques shared by members of a research community”. According to Sefotho (2015:23), a paradigm is a comprehensive belief system, worldview or framework that guides research and practice in a field of study. A paradigm represents the fundamental assumptions and practices that are used to conduct a research project by shaping and understanding the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007:19). In educational research, the term “paradigm” is used to describe a researcher’s “worldview”

(Mackenzie & Knipe, 2016:2). Paradigms thus provide beliefs and dictates, which, for scholars in a particular discipline, influence what should be studied, how it should be studied and how the results of the study should be interpreted (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:26).

The researcher's view of the paradigm in tandem with the definitions provided above is that it is a framework of beliefs, values and assumptions which guide the study or research project based on the researcher's understanding of the world. It guides the researcher on what to research, how to go about researching the topic of interest and how to interpret the results. As the researcher conducts a research, he/she becomes intentional about his/her actions to provide answers to the research questions and solve the problem identified in the study.

According to Mackenzie and Knipe (2016:2), several theoretical paradigms are discussed in the literature, such as positivist, constructivist, interpretivist, transformative, pragmatism, emancipatory, critical and deconstructivist paradigms. A brief discussion of the most common paradigms referred to in research follows.

### 5.4.2 Different types of research paradigms

#### 5.4.2.1 Positivist research paradigm

Positivism is sometimes referred to as a "scientific method" or "science research" and is "based on the rationalistic, empiricist philosophy" (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2016:2). Positivism may be applied to the social world on the assumption that:

> "the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world, that there is a method for studying the social world that is value free, and that explanations of a causal nature can be provided" (Mertens, 2005:8).

According to O'Leary (2004:5), positivists aim to test a theory or describe an experience through observation and measurement to predict and control forces that surround us. The positivist research is most commonly aligned with quantitative methods of data

collection and analysis (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2016:3).

#### 5.4.2.2 Interpretivist/constructivist

Interpretivist/constructivist approaches to research have the intention of understanding the world of human experience (Cohen & Manion, 1994:36). According to Mertens (2005:12), this position suggests that "reality is socially constructed". Interpretivists/constructivists mostly rely on participants' views regarding the topic under study (Creswell, 2003:8) and recognise the impact of their own background and experiences on the research. This means that this paradigm creates knowledge based on experiences and regards previous knowledge as crucial. Constructivists do not generally begin with a theory, instead they "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings" (Creswell, 2003:9) throughout the research process. Mackenzie and Knipe (2016:3) document that the constructivist researcher is most likely to rely on the qualitative data collection methods and analysis or a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed methods research [MMR]). Quantitative data may be utilised in a way that supports or expands upon qualitative data and it effectively deepens the description.

#### 5.4.2.3 Transformative research paradigm

Creswell (2003:9) indicates that transformative researchers feel that the interpretivist/constructivist approach to research does not adequately address issues of social justice and marginalised people. Mackenzie and Knipe (2016:3) and Creswell (2003:9) are of the view that transformative researchers believe that inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political agenda. Furthermore, they believe that an action agenda for reform may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live and the researcher's life. Transformative researchers may utilise qualitative and quantitative data collection. However, a MMR approach provides the transformative researcher with a structure for the development of more complete and full portraits of the social world through the use of multiple perspectives and lenses (Somekh & Lewin, 2005:275).

#### 5.4.2.4 Pragmatic research paradigm

Pragmatist researchers focus on the “what” and “how” of the research problem (Creswell, 2003:11). Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy or reality. Early pragmatists rejected the scientific notion that social inquiry was able to access the “truth” about the real world solely by virtue of a single scientific method (Mertens, 2005:26). Pragmatists use MMR research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Somekh & Lewin, 2005). The pragmatic paradigm places “the research problem” as central and applies all approaches to understanding the problem (Creswell, 2003:11). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985 cited by Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:26), there are four elements in each paradigm, namely, epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology.

Epistemology has its aetiology in Greek where the word *episteme* means knowledge. In research, epistemology is used to describe how we come to know something; how we know the truth or reality (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:27). It is concerned with the nature of knowledge, its forms, how it can be acquired, and how it can be communicated to other human beings. To respond to the questions above, further questions that would assist the researcher to respond to the questions above should be asked. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:27) advocate for the following questions to assist the process: How do we know the truth? What counts as knowledge? Epistemology, according to these authorities, is grounded in authoritative knowledge only if the researcher gathered data from knowledgeable people, books or leaders of organisations. Epistemology is important because it establishes the faith the researcher puts in the data collected and it affects how the researcher will go about uncovering knowledge in the social context under investigation. The researcher’s understanding of epistemology is that it is a theory of knowledge and its justification of what the researcher knows.

Ontology is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the assumptions made to believe that something makes sense or is real, or the very nature or essence of the social phenomenon being investigated (Scotland, 2012 cited by Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:27). Philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality explain how a

researcher makes meaning of the data gathered. These assumptions, concepts or propositions help to orientate the thinking about the research problem, its significance, and how it might be approached to answer the research question, understand the problem investigated and contribute to its solution. Finally, ontology examines the researcher's underlying belief system about the nature of being and existence (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:27). To summarise the ontological philosophy, three key questions could be asked: What exists? Is it true? Is it real?

Axiology refers to the ethical issues that need to be considered when planning a research project. It involves defining, evaluating and understanding concepts of right and wrong behaviour relating to the research. It addresses the question: What is the nature of ethics or ethical behaviour expected when conducting research? The implementation of ethical considerations focuses on four principles which need to be adhered to when dealing with participants and data: privacy, informed consent, disclosure accuracy, property and accessibility. This study expresses itself in terms of the ethical protocol that was followed (see section 5.10). Methodology refers to how knowledge is discovered and analysed in a systematic way. It is a philosophy that guides how knowledge should be gathered.

From the discussion above, interpretivist/constructivist paradigm was appropriate for this study because the researcher constructed meaning from the experiences of the participants based on the epistemology that knowledge is socially constructed and not individually. This means that the researcher and participants engaged with the phenomenon of ITM interactively. They entered into a conversation or dialogue, questioned, listened, read, wrote and recorded the research data. This paradigm assumes a subjectivist epistemology, a relativist ontology, a naturalist methodology and a balanced axiology. The subjectivist epistemology means that the researcher makes meaning of the data through the participants' own thinking and cognitive processing of data informed by his/her interaction with them (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33). In the case of this study, the researcher made meaning through the process of collecting data by interacting with the participants and other sources of information discussed later in this

chapter.

The ontological viewpoint of this paradigm in the evaluation of the ITM is based on relativism. This stance posits that the researcher believes that the situation studied has multiple realities and that those realities can be explored and meaning made of them or reconstructed through human interactions between the researcher and the subjects of the research, and among the research participants (Chalmers, Manley & Wasserman, 2005 cited in Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33). This paradigm assumes a balanced axiological position in the sense that the outcome of the research reflects the values of the researcher by presenting a balanced report of the findings. In assuming a naturalist methodology, the researcher utilised data gathered through individual interviews, focus groups, document analysis and questionnaires. According to this paradigm, both qualitative and quantitative methods (MMR) are used to collect data which can assist the process of constructing meaning. The discussion that follows is about the research design that was chosen for this study.

## 5.5 Research design

McMillan and Schumacher (2010:102) define a research design as a plan for selecting subjects, research sites and data collection procedures to answer the research question(s). Other literature views a research design as the systematic process of collecting and logically analysing data to establish novel facts, solve new or existing problems, provide new ideas or develop new theories usually using a scientific method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:9). Maree (2012:70) indicates that a research design is a:

> "plan or strategy, which moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to specify the selection of respondents, the data gathering techniques and the data analysis techniques to be used."

Furthermore, Leedy and Ormrod (2013:2) define a research design as the systematic process of collecting, analysing and interpreting data to increase understanding of a phenomenon.

For purposes of this study, research design is viewed as a strategic plan or roadmap followed by a researcher in a most systematic way. The purpose of the plan/roadmap in this study was to guide the researcher in the process of collecting data from relevant stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the ITM in DL at Unisa. The roadmap assisted the researcher to keep focus to the key areas of the study.

This study followed a mixed method research (MMR) approach using a single case study design. MMR employs strategies of inquiry that involve collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand research problems (Creswell, 2003:18). According to Creswell (2003), data collection involves gathering both numeric information as well as text information so that the final database represents both quantitative and qualitative information. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003:711) agree with the above definition and define the MMR approach as:

> "a type of research design in which qualitative (QUAL) and quantitative (QUAN) approaches are used in types of questions, research methods, data collection and analysis procedures, and/or inferences".

According to these researchers, MMR occurs in all stages of the study that include the formulation of the research questions, data collection procedures and research method, and the interpretation of the results to make final inferences.

The emphasis in both definitions indicates that the MMR approach draws the best characteristics of quantitative and qualitative methods, mixes them in a certain way to collect data, analyse, interpret and draw a conclusion. Johnson and Christensen (2012:435) distinguish different types of MMR research designs. They suggest that, when MMR is used in a study, data are collected and analysed using both quantitative and qualitative data separately, the two forms of data are mixed in different ways, priority is given to one or both forms of data, and the data can be the result of a single study or multiple phases of a study.

Flick (2009:189 citing Creswell, 2003) supports Johnson and Christensen (2012) by indicating three forms of MMR design, namely, phase designs in which qualitative and

quantitative methods are applied separately one after the other (in any order); dominant or less-dominant design, which is mainly committed to one of the approaches and uses the other only marginally; and one that links the two approaches in all phases of the research process. When MMR is used, the design can give an equal status to qualitative and quantitative approach. This means that these approaches are conducted concurrently in the sense that data collection is done simultaneously and results are also analysed at the same time since both approaches are treated equally within the study. Johnson and Christensen (2012:435) provide a symbolical representation for an equal status and concurrent process of this design, “QUAL + QUAN” as captured in the first quadrant in Figure 5.2. If both components are dominant, their dominance will be represented by a capital letter in the symbolical representation. Punch and Oancea (2014:345) explain that this type of design is referred to as triangulation MMR design. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:70) refer to this design as a convergent parallel research design. The purpose of this design is to obtain complementary quantitative and qualitative data on the same topic, bringing together the different strengths of each paradigm. Laws, Harper and Marcus (2013:143) point out that “the key to triangulation is to see the same thing from different perspectives and thus to be able to confirm or challenge the findings of one method with those of another”. She warns that “accounts collected from different perspectives may not match tidily at all”. There may be mismatches and even conflict between them. A mismatch does not necessarily mean that the data collection process is flawed instead it could be that participants just have very different accounts of similar phenomena. Should a mismatch occur in a study, Laws et al. (2013) advise that the meaning of any mismatch be critically examined. The current study posits that if the mismatch is critically examined, mismatches would be justified.

The design can give a dominant-status concurrent design either to a qualitative or quantitative approach. If the qualitative approach is dominant, this means that it is regarded as a “primary part of the project and that the quantitative approach is merely helping to illustrate or further confirm the qualitative results” (Ngulube & Romm, 2015:161). This is shown in the second quadrant in Figure 5.2. Johnson and

Christensen (2012:436) explain that, even though both approaches are used concurrently, when a qualitative approach is given a dominant status, more qualitative data will be collected than quantitative data. This will also happen in a longer period compared to quantitative data collection. The symbolical representation of the dominant concurrent procedure is illustrated with the symbol Qual + quan. This means that the qualitative approach is dominant in the study, but if the symbol Quan + quan is used, the quantitative approach is dominant. It should be noted that the dominant approach always commences with a capital.

| | **Concurrent** | **Sequential** |
|---|---|---|
| **Equal status** | **1**<br>QUAL + QUAN | **3**<br>QUAL →QUAN<br>QUAN→QUAL |
| **Dominant status** | **2**<br>QUAL + quan<br>QUAN + qual | **4**<br>QUAL → Quan<br>qual→QUAN<br>QUAN→qual<br>quan→QUAL |

**Figure 5.2: MMR design matrix**
(Source: Adapted from Johnson & Christensen, 2012:435)

The study can also use a dominant-status sequential design, which is illustrated in the third quadrant in Figure 5.2. Both qualitative and quantitative approach are given an equal status. However, this can happen sequentially. When this design is used, the research procedure starts with one and moves to the next. The symbolical representation of this design is captured as QUAL→QUAN or QUAN→QUAL depending on the sequence that the researcher will follow.

It is also possible that the study uses a dominant-sequential design in the research process. In this type of design, the process starts from the dominant component to the

one with the least weight. Alternatively, the research process will start with the component of the least weight and move to the dominant component. The symbolical representation as captured in the fourth quadrant in Figure 5.2 is QUAN→qual, or QUAL→quan if the process starts with the dominant component and moves to a less dominant component. When the research process starts with a less dominant component and moves to a dominant component, the symbolical representation is captured as quan→QUAL or qual→Quan. Punch and Oancea (2014:346) term this design as exploratory research design.

This study used a dominant-sequential design and the symbolical representative thereof is captured as QUAL → Quan. This is a research design that gives a qualitative approach a primary or dominant status during the data collection stage of research and gives a quantitative research design a secondary status. According to this design, more qualitative data were collected first since they were the dominant component. In that sense, the quantitative component had carried the least weight. As stated above, the chosen design is exploratory as the needs of students using ITM at Unisa were explored.

## 5.6 Case study design

A case study design was used to evaluate the ITM in the context of Unisa. Johnson and Christensen (2012:395) indicate that a case study is a research that "provides a detailed account and analysis of one or more cases". Literature explains that there are various types of case studies depending on the purpose of the study under research (Baxter & Jack, 2008:547). The explanatory case study seeks to answer a question that sought to explain the presumed causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies. The exploratory case study is used to explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes. The descriptive case study describes an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred. The multiple-case study enables the researcher to explore differences within and between cases. The goal is to replicate findings across

cases. The intrinsic case is a type that is used to better understand the case. It is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem but, because in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest. The instrumental case study is used to accomplish something other than understanding a particular situation. It provides insight into an issue or helps to refine a theory. Collective case studies are similar in nature and description to multiple case studies. In the present study, the exploratory case study was found to be appropriate as the researcher embarked on exploring the effectiveness of the ITM in meeting students' needs in teaching and learning in a DL environment in the context of Unisa.

Creswell (2007:96) refers to a distinguishing characteristic of a case study, i.e. a bounded system. When a researcher investigates a case, it should be within a bounded system. A bounded case, according to Creswell (2007:74), refers to the number of people involved, i.e., whether the case will involve one individual, several individuals or a group of people. The case may also be bounded by time in the sense that the duration for collecting data must be clearly stated right from the beginning of the case. The case may also be bounded by place, which means that the researcher needs to describe the place and context in which the study will be undertaken.

In the current study, the exploratory case in use was bounded by all the elements mentioned above. The number of the participants involved in the case is defined in the discussion that follows. The duration of data collection was indicated right from the beginning of the data collection phase. Data were collected at Unisa regional service centres, hubs, agencies and academic departments. Data and procedures of their collection are discussed extensively in the paragraphs that follow. The Unisa context has already been defined at the beginning of this chapter (section 5.2) where the study sites and the target group were discussed.

## 5.7 Population and sampling

Population in research refers to a large group of people who will be used to draw data

from with a purpose of answering the research questions. Punch and Oancea (2014:381) explain that a population is a “target group, usually large, about whom we want to develop knowledge, but which we cannot study directly in its entirety; therefore, we sample from that population”. A sample, according to Punch and Oancea (2014:382), is “a smaller group that is actually studied, drawn from a larger population; data are collected and analysed from the sample and inferences are then made to the population”.

Welman et al. (2005:56) explain that there are two categories of sampling techniques in research, probability and non-probability sampling. According to these researchers, probability sampling determines that any element or member of the population will be included in the sample. On the other hand, in non-probability sampling, a researcher cannot specify the probability. The researcher makes a distinction between different types of probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Non-probability sampling is comprised of simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, systematic sampling and cluster sampling. Probability sampling has six types, accidental or incidental sampling, quota sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, self-selection sampling and convenience sampling. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:485-491) define these various types of probability sampling as follows:

> Simple random sampling is a sampling method in which every member of the population has the same chance of being selected. Stratified random sampling is a form of random sampling in which a population is first divided into sub-groups and then subjects are selected from each sub-group. Cluster sampling is a form of probability sampling in which subjects are first grouped according to naturally occurring traits. Finally, systematic sampling is form of sampling in which subjects are selected from a continuous list by choosing every ninth subject.

Welman et al. (2005:68) describe accidental or incidental type of sampling as the “most convenient collection of members of the population that are near and readily available for research purpose”. This type of sampling is not difficult to find and is available when needed by the researcher. Quota sampling is described by McMillan and Schumacher

(2010:490) as “a non-probability method of sampling in which subjects are selected in proportion to the characteristics they represent in the general population”. Another type of sampling is snowball sampling in which the researcher approaches a few individuals from the relevant population and those individuals, in turn, act as informants and identify other members from the same population for inclusion in the sample. The latter may, in turn, identify a further set of relevant individuals so that the sample grows in size until saturation is reached (Welman et al., 2005:69).

Welman et al. (2005:69) further explain self-selection sampling as a type of sampling that occurs when a researcher allows individuals to identify their desire to take part in the research. The researcher will therefore publicise the need for participants by making an invitation through appropriate media or by asking individuals to participate in the research. Convenience sampling involves haphazardly selecting those cases that are easiest to obtain for the sample (Welman et al., 2005:69). These are subjects that are available or accessible (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:486). Purposive sampling is:

> “a type of sampling that allows choosing small groups or individuals who are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon of interest, selecting cases without needing or desiring to generalise to all such cases”.

This study focused on the student support professional administrative staff, academic staff and students. However, because this is a big population, a sample was drawn from these groups. The study therefore followed a purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques. A purposive sampling technique, which falls under probability sampling, was used to collect data from the above-mentioned population that is practically involved in the implementation of the ITM at Unisa. This technique was used to collect data from seventeen (17) Unisa staff members through individual interviews and fifty-six (56) students through focus groups interviews. This type of sampling was chosen because it allowed the researcher to choose a group of individuals who were knowledgeable, had information about ITM and had first-hand experience in the day-to-day implementation of the ITM. Welman et al. (2005:69) state that purposive sampling assists researchers to choose those samples that have experience about the

phenomenon. This type of sampling technique was found to be appropriate for this study since only the participants who are implementers of the ITM were involved in the study. A simple random sampling technique, on the other hand, was used to collect quantitative data through a questionnaire from two thousand (2000) students who were involved in the ITM. A total of 949 (47.5%) students responded to the questionnaire. In brief, the sample for the study is illustrated in Table 5.1 that also includes the data collection methods used on the categories/types of samples. The methods are discussed under section 5.7.2.

**Table 5.1: A profile of participants in the qualitative and quantitative data collection.**

| Region | Colleges | Participants | Sampling methods | Data collection methods |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Qualitative part** | | | | |
| **Students** | | | | |
| Gauteng Region | College of Law (CLAW)<br>College of Education (CEDU)<br>College of Human Sciences (CHS)<br>College of Accounting Sciences (CAS)<br>College of Economics and Management Sciences (CEMS)<br>College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES)<br>College of Science, Engineering and Technology (CSET) | 14 students (2 students per college) | Purposive sampling was applied to sample a group of students who were involved in the ITM from a larger group. These students were requested to participate in the focus groups because they were supported and used the ITM as a student support programme. | Two focus group interviews |
| KwaZulu-Natal Region | College of Law (CLAW)<br>College of Education (CEDU)<br>College of Human Sciences (CHS)<br>College of Accounting Sciences (CAS)<br>College of Economics and Management Sciences (CEMS)<br>College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES)<br>College of Science, Engineering and | 14 students (2 students per college) | | Two focus group interviews |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Technology (CSET) | | | |
| North Eastern Region | College of Law (CLAW)<br>College of Education (CEDU)<br>College of Human Sciences (CHS)<br>College of Accounting Sciences (CAS)<br>College of Economics and Management Sciences (CEMS)<br>College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES)<br>College of Science, Engineering and Technology (CSET) | 7 students (1 in each college) | | One focus group interview |
| Midlands Region | College of Law (CLAW)<br>College of Education (CEDU)<br>College of Human Sciences (CHS)<br>College of Accounting Sciences (CAS)<br>College of Economics and Management Sciences (CEMS)<br>College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES)<br>College of Science, Engineering and Technology (CSET) | 7 students (1 in each college) | | One focus group interview |
| Western Cape Region | College of Law (CLAW)<br>College of Education (CEDU)<br>College of Human Sciences (CHS)<br>College of Accounting Sciences (CAS)<br>College of Economics and Management Sciences (CEMS)<br>College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES)<br>College of Science, Engineering and Technology (CSET) | 7 students (1 in each college) | | One Focus group interview |
| Eastern Cape Region | College of Law (CLAW)<br>College of Education (CEDU)<br>College of Human Sciences (CHS)<br>College of Accounting Sciences | 7 students (1 in each college) | | One focus group interview |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (CAS)<br>College of Economics and Management Sciences (CEMS)<br>College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES)<br>College of Science, Engineering and Technology (CSET) | | | |
| **A total of 56 students was targeted to participate in the focus groups interviews.** | | | | |
| **Staff members** | | | | |
| **Region/ college** | **Participants** | **Sampling technique** | **Data collection method** | |
| Gauteng Region | • One Regional Academic Coordinator<br>• One Tutorial Officer | Purposive sampling technique was applied to interview individual staff members who are knowledgeable and involved in the administration and management of the ITM. They were able to provide relevant information needed for the study. | Individual interviews | |
| KwaZulu-Natal Region | • One Head of Facilitation of Learning<br>• One Tutorial Officer | | | |
| Eastern Cape | • One Head of Facilitation of Learning<br>• One Tutorial Officer | | | |
| North Eastern Region | • One Regional Academic Coordinator | | | |
| **CEDU** | • One lecturer<br>• One HR officer | | | |
| **CEMS** | • One Lecturer<br>• One tutor<br>• One Academic Support Coordinator | | | |
| **CAS** | • One tutor<br>• One Academic Support Coordinator | | | |
| **CAES** | • One Academic Support | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Coordinator | | | |
| **CHS** | • One HR officer<br>• One Academic Support Coordinator | | | |
| **CAES** | • One Academic Support Coordinator | | | |
| **CLAW** | • One HR officer<br>• One Tutor | | | |
| **21 staff members in total is targeted for individual interviews** | | | | |
| **Quantitative part** | | | | |
| **Region** | **Colleges** | **Participants** | **Sampling technique** | **Data collection methods** |
| **Students** | | | | |
| Gauteng Region | College of Law<br>College of Education<br>College of Human Sciences<br>College of Accounting Sciences<br>College of Economics and Management Sciences<br>College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences<br>College of Science, Engineering and Technology | 50 students<br>80 students<br>70 students<br>80 students<br>70 students<br>50 students<br>50 students | In this study, simple random sampling was applied to sample a group of students who were involved in the ITM from a larger group. These students were included in the sample to complete a questionnaire because they were supported and used the ITM as a learner support programme. | Questionnaire |
| | **Total** | **450** | | |
| KwaZulu-Natal Region | College of Law<br>College of Education<br>College of Human Sciences<br>College of Accounting Sciences<br>College of Economics and Management Sciences<br>College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences<br>College of Science, Engineering and Technology | 50 students<br>80 students<br>70 students<br>80 students<br>70 students<br>50 students<br>50 students | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Total** | **450** | | |
| Midlands Region | College of Law<br>College of Education<br>College of Human Sciences<br>College of Accounting Sciences<br>College of Economics and Management Sciences<br>College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences<br>College of Science, Engineering and Technology | 50 students<br>50 students<br>50 students<br>50 students<br>50 students<br>50 students<br>50 students | | |
| | **Total** | **350** | | |
| North Eastern Region | College of Law<br>College of Education<br>College of Human Sciences<br>College of Accounting Sciences<br>College of Economics and Management Sciences<br>College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences<br>College of Science, Engineering and Technology | 50 students<br>50 students<br>50 students<br>50 students<br>50 students<br>50 students<br>50 students | | |
| | **Total** | **350** | | |
| Western Cape Region | College of Law<br>College of Education<br>College of Human Sciences<br>College of Accounting Sciences<br>College of Economics and Management Sciences<br>College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences<br>College of Science, Engineering and Technology | 20 students<br>40 students<br>40 students<br>40 students<br>30 students<br>10 students<br>20 students | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Total** | **350** | | |
| Eastern Cape Region | College of Law<br>College of Education<br>College of Human Sciences<br>College of Accounting Sciences<br>College of Economics and Management Sciences<br>College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences<br>College of Science, Engineering and Technology | 20 students<br>40 students<br>40 students<br>40 students<br>30 students<br>10 students<br>20 students | | |
| | **Total** | **200** | | |
| **The total number of students targeted to respond to the questionnaire was 2000 for all the six regions** | | | | |

During the quantitative research design phase, data were collected through 2000 questionnaires that were distributed to the participants in all the regions. This number is a good representation of the 26 regional centres nationally. The findings of the two phases were integrated during the interpretation phase of the study to answer the research questions. When samples were conducted, various methods of collecting data from the samples were used. The discussion that follows focuses on various data collection methods and the design of each instrument as well as the merits and demerits of each instrument.

## 5.8 Data collection methods and Instrumentation

Babbie and Mouton (2008:74) define the term “research methodology” as a researcher’s general approach in carrying out the research project. On the other hand, Soanes (2002:565) indicates that the research methodology refers to a system of methods used in a particular field to reach a valid and reliable perception of phenomena, events, processes or issues at many different levels. These two definitions give an indication that research methodology refers to the tools or techniques used to collect data from the

participants of the research project. The discussion that follows explains the rationale for using these techniques in this study and acknowledges the merits and demerits of each technique.

### 5.8.1 Qualitative methods and instruments

Watkins and Gioia (2015:46) define data collection methods as a set of procedures that are intentional and planned for the purpose of collecting a certain type and number of data sources that will be used to address a research question. These researchers suggest that, as the researcher embarks on the data collection stage, it is important to consider the size of the sample because this can determine the duration of the research project. Various methods of data collection were used to gather information in this study. Each method is discussed and justified below.

#### *5.8.1.1 Individual interviews*

The first method that was used to collect data from the participants as profiled in Table 5.1 was individual interviews. Creswell (2010:87) defines an interview as communication that flows from both sides where data are being collected by the interviewer through questioning the participants to learn about their conduct, views, ideas, beliefs and opinions. Flick (2009:253) opines that an interview, as a form of data collection strategy, is aimed at obtaining individual views of the interviewees on an issue. As such, it should initiate a dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee. Literature indicates that there are different types of interview schedules that could be used to collect data, i.e., structured interviews, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:206). For purposes of this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews because it allowed flexibility in terms of answering questions. Lawson and Philpott (2008:77) support this notion by indicating that semi-structured interviews make use of a set of standard questions but allow the researcher to add questions or to probe in response to answers that have been given. This is also supported by Johnson and Christensen (2012:202) who indicate that the researcher asks follow-up questions to get clarity on certain aspects during the

interview.

When the interview guide was designed, the following were taken into consideration as they assisted the process of the interview to run smoothly with limited challenges:

- The purpose of the interview should be clearly stated. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:358) state that it is important for the statement of the researcher's purpose and focus to be made right from the initial stage of the interview. The purpose of the study was made clear to the participants' from the beginning of the interview.
- The design of the interview guide should be structured in a way that questions start with simple items and move to complex items of the interview schedule. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:359) note that this will assist to establish rapport. This was ensured by first exploring the biographical data of the participants and asking them a couple of introductory/general questions that would set them at ease in the interviews.
- The design should ensure that the duration of the interview does not last for more than an hour. This is supported by Johnson and Christensen (2012:202) who indicate that the duration of a qualitative interview is usually from 30 minutes to an hour. The interviews in this study lasted for 60 to 90 minutes.
- The interview questions should be posed in such a way that they can answer the research questions. Care was taken to ask the participants questions in such a manner that elucidated answers to the research questions. This was done by means of probes or follow-up questions

(Johnson & Christensen, 2004:183).

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher explained ethical considerations in terms of confidentiality, the overview of the study and how the interview will unfold. The interviews were recorded using an electronic recorder. Participants were informed about the recording prior to the commencement of the interview so that they could consent to it. Digital recording of the interviews, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:360), "ensures completeness of the verbal interaction and provides material for

reliability checks". The recording of the interviews did not exonerate the researcher from writing down the responses of the participants as it augmented the recorded data. "Artistic researchers" may even make sketches of the gesture language which the recorder may not capture. Interviews, as stated by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2008:348), enable participants, be they interviewers or interviewees, to explain their understanding of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view.

Individual interviews carry both merits and demerits. A merit of using this type of interview is that it has the potential to generate detailed data especially when there is a trusting relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The good relations the researcher has in each region assisted her to interact well with the regional staff and generate detailed data. Staff members were free to talk about anything asked and even gave more information than necessary. According to Kumar (2014:182), interviews are useful for collecting in-depth information by means of probing and questions can be explained. The demerits of using this type of data collection method are that interviews are time consuming and expensive, and the quality of data collected is dependent upon the quality of the interaction and the interviewer. Travelling may be costly if data are collected in various places. Individual interviews were conducted in each regional staff's premises and all staff members were scheduled using an electronic diary. Even though the interviews were supposed to take an hour, the researcher scheduled them for 90 minutes to cater for any time constraints or unforeseen challenges that might impact on the process. Travelling costs were mitigated by ensuring that only the researcher travelled to the places where the participants are based. Participants were not required to do any travelling.

The challenges encountered during data collection were that, due to the unavailability of some participants on the scheduled dates, an alternative mode of data collection was used. Three participants from the regions were not available during the period of data collection due to other activities in their offices and Microsoft teams and Scopia were used to connect with them for the interviews.

An interview guide was developed with the relevant questions that allowed the participant to respond as guided by the interviewer. The interview guide was designed to collect data to evaluate the effectiveness of the ITM in DL. Five sets of interview guides were developed, i.e., for students (see Appendix 1, FGI guide), tutors (see Appendix 2), lecturers (see Appendix 3), college administrators who are Academic Support Coordinators (see Appendix 4) and Regional staff (see Appendix 5).

Section A of the interview guide focused on the biographical data of the interviewees and covered aspects such as years of experience, college where the interviewee is based and modules the interviewee is involved with. Section B focused on questions related to the research questions stated in Chapter One. These questions addressed the needs and expectations of students involved in the ITM programme. The aspects include the empathy theory of learning which upholds the fact that students need and expect to be supported by the organisation, have a personal relationship with the university and are motivated by teaching staff to remain in the institution (Holmberg, 2003:43) and finish their studies.

The second aspect focused on the quality of the ITM, the third aspect focused on access and participation, the fourth aspect focused on the Africanisation of ITM. The afore-mentioned areas of focus relate to the social constructivism theory of learning in the study, Salmon's five stages of e-learning and the connectivist theory of learning. The quality aspect looked into issues such as the promise made by Unisa to students, as embedded in Unisa (2013b:9), which indicates that Unisa commits to providing excellent service to all its students, e.g., quality of tutors, quality of tutoring, quality of communication, provision of resources for students participating in the tutorial programme, timeous feedback to students, availability of tutors online and in face-to-face classes and the facilitation of learning of these tutorial classes.

Access and participation in the ITM looked into the issues of access to internet, Unisa computer laboratories, F2F classes that are within reach of students' residences and access to tutors and lecturers for students to interact with them in their learning journey. These aspects relate to the Salmon's five stages of e-learning model with specific

reference to stage one of this model which deals with access and motivation. Access and participation also relate to connectivism as it relates to learning, which advocates for students to have access to specialised nodes of information sources and tools for learning to take place (Kop & Hill, 2008:6).

The Africanisation of tutorial support focused on the design of the tutor support programme to address the needs of African students in an African context. This aspect focused on issues of geographical location of tutorial centres, flexibility in terms of language of tutoring, technology skills for students, showcasing of African practices and experiences in a tutorial class, understanding the background and context of an African student and the socialisation of an African child and how he/she learns. This focus area relates to the social constructivist theory of learning which upholds Ubuntu. It also relates to Salmon's five stages of e-learning model with specific reference to socialisation and information exchange during interaction of students in a class. The last focus area of individual interviews covers the aspect of improvement of the ITM and what should be considered in the evaluation of the ITM model.

#### *5.8.1.2 Focus group interviews (FGI)*

De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005:306) define a focus group interview (FGI) as a research method that collects data through group interaction on a topic previously determined. Kumar (2014:193) explains that, in a focus group interview, the interviewer explores the perceptions, experiences and understandings of a group of people who have some experiences in common with regards to a situation or event. This means that the FGI can only occur through engagement with a group of people gathered in a single venue with a purpose of discussing a particular topic and led by an interviewer. Johnson and Christensen (2004:185) explain that it is called FGI because the researcher needs to keep individuals in a group focused on the topic under discussion. This homogenous group should consist of six to 12 participants who are purposefully selected because they can provide information of interest to the researcher. This number is recommended for effective management of the group. The researcher should conduct two to four focus

group interviews to ascertain the information provided by different groups.

The following interview guide (Table 5.2), designed and adapted from Segaole (2018:82), was used for the focus group interview data collection instrument (see Appendix 1).

**Table 5.2: A guide for questioning during the focus group interview**

| **Type of question** | **Purpose of the question** |
|---|---|
| Opening questions | To identify the characteristics that the participants have in common. Participants should be given an opportunity to introduce themselves.<br>The opening question will cover the biographical data of each interviewee. For example, they will each introduce themselves, where they live, the qualification they are studying, academic year of study and modules they are enrolled for in the current year. |
| Introductory questions | To introduce the general topic of the discussion and to stimulate the conversation and improve interaction in the group.<br>Example of a generic question: Unisa provides a tutorial support programme to its students through the integrated tutor model. Kindly share your knowledge and understanding about this programme. |
| Transition questions | To move the participants into the focus of the discussion.<br>How do you feel about the programme? Do you think students' needs and expectations are met by the ITM? Kindly elaborate. |
| Key questions | Concern about the focus of the interview.<br>In your involvement with the ITM, do you think this model provides quality support to students? Why do you say so?<br>What is the impact of the ITM on students' access and participation at Unisa?<br>Is the ITM designed to suit the needs and expectations of African students? Elaborate. |
| Ending questions | Give the participants an opportunity to make final statements.<br>Of all the things we have discussed, what would you prioritise to improve the ITM to cater for students' teaching and learning needs? |
| Final questions | Ask the participants to add things they think have not been |

| Type of question | Purpose of the question |
|---|---|
| | considered during the discussion.<br>Is there anything you would like to add which you think could assist this project? |

The use of the FGI was advantageous because the researcher was able to gather much data in a single sitting. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018:188), participants can provide historical information and allow the researcher control over the line of questioning. The demerits of the FGI include the provision of information in a specified venue and not in a natural field setting, the researcher's presence may result in bias and the researcher may not be in contact with outspoken participants who can provide information as guided by the instrument. The challenge encountered by the researcher in the field was that some of the participants were not as outspoken as others in the group and the researcher had to probe to encourage them to participate. This was beneficial as some of them gave detailed information in their answers. The researcher prevented certain participants, particularly members of the Students Representative Council (SRC), from dominating the discussions, by asking them to reserve their responses to give others a chance to speak.

The researcher capitalised on the merits of the FGI by gathering data from two focus groups in bigger regions and one focus group in smaller regions. To mitigate the demerits related to venues for the FGIs, the researcher made the participants feel at ease in the venue where interviews took place by creating a welcoming and friendly environment. The researcher introduced herself to the participants, stating the purpose of the interviews, why this particular group of students were invited and not others, thanked and appreciated that they took time out of their busy schedules to participate in the FGIs, provided the ground rules and emphasised that there were no wrong answers and everyone should speak his/her mind without being judged.

The FGIs had the same areas of focus discussed in the individual interviews that contained aspects that relate to the theoretical framework of the study. The questions asked during the FGIs assisted the researcher to answer the research questions. The

opening question of the FGI focused on the information that is generic to all participants. This question covered the biographical data of the interviewees, such as years of experience, college where the interviewee is based and modules the interviewee is studying. The item that followed the generic question asked for a response to a research question which sought to address the needs and expectations of students involved in the ITM programme. The aspects of needs and expectations relate to the empathy theory of learning. Students need and expect to be supported by the university. On the other hand, the university needs to build stronger relationships with students by ensuring that they are motivated and supported. This type of relationship can contribute towards student retention (Holmberg, 2003:44). The second aspect focused on the quality of the ITM, the third on access and participation, and the fourth on the Africanisation of ITM. The afore-mentioned areas of focus relate to the social constructivist theory of learning in the study, Salmon's five stages of e-learning and the connectivist theory of learning.

The quality aspect looked into issues such as the promise made by Unisa to students as embedded in Unisa (2016:6), which indicates that Unisa commits to providing excellent service to all its students, e.g., quality tutors, quality of tutoring, quality of communication, provision of resources for students participating in the tutorial programme, timeous feedback to students, availability of tutors online and in F2F classes and the facilitation of learning in these tutorial classes. Access and participation looked into issues of access to internet, Unisa computer laboratories, F2F classes that are within reach of students' residences and access to tutors and lecturers for students to interact with them in their learning journey. These aspects relate to Salmon's five stages of e-learning model with specific reference to stage one of this model which deals with access and motivation. Access also relates to the connectivist theory of learning which advocates for students to have access to specialised nodes of information sources and tools for learning to take place (Kop & Hill, 2008:6).

The Africanisation of tutorial support focused on the design of the tutor support programme to address the needs of African students in an African context. This aspect focused on issues of geographical location of tutorial centres, flexibility in terms of

language of tutoring, technology skills for students, showcasing of African practices and experiences in a tutorial class and understanding the background and context of an African student. Socialisation of an African child and how he/she learns is another aspect of Africanisation in DLE. This focus area relates to the social constructivist theory of learning which upholds the Ubuntu aspect. It also relates to Salmon's five stages of e-learning model with specific reference to socialisation and information exchange during interaction of students in a class. The last focus areas of individual interviews covered the aspect of improvement of the ITM and aspects that were evaluated for this purpose in the ITM.

#### *5.8.1.3 Document analysis*

The last method that was used to collect data is document analysis. Document analysis is considered as the systematic scrutiny of instructional documents, such as syllabi, schemes of work, past examination papers and lesson notes, to reveal instructional needs and challenges (Denscombe, 2007:217). According to Munikwa (2016:106), document analysis is the process of examining documents to establish intentions and trends in practices. For purposes of this study, document analysis was defined as a process of scrutinising official documents, which may include policies, processes and procedures of the institution or organisation to identify gaps and develop an intervention. These documents describe functions, values and how various people define the organisation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:361). Official Unisa documents, such as ITM implementation plans, ITM reports and ITM minutes, were consulted as they contain relevant information about the ITM. The rationale for using document analysis is that it served to complement the other methods of data collection used in the study.

Creswell and Creswell (2018:188) present the merits of document analysis as follows:

- They enable a researcher to obtain the language and words of participants;
- They can be accessed at a time convenient to a researcher;

- They save the researcher's time and the expense of transcribing since they are written evidence; and
- They represent data to which the participants have given attention.

Bowen (2009:30) indicates that documents provide supplementary research data in the sense that they:

- provide a means of tracking change and development; and
- can be analysed to verify findings or corroborate evidence from other sources.

Demerits of document analysis, according to these authorities, include data that are protected and may not be available to the researcher, require the researcher to search for information, require scanning for computer entry, incomplete materials and documents that may not be authentic. In addition to these demerits posited by Creswell and Creswell (2018:188), the researcher submits that some documents may be written by people who did not interact directly with the phenomenon and this could result in misrepresentation or misinterpretation of facts. This claim is submitted given the researcher's experience in the field of tutorial support at Unisa. Permission granted by Unisa to access the documents needed mitigated the challenges mentioned in the foregoing discussion.

### 5.8.2 Quantitative methods and instrumentation

#### 5.8.2.1 Questionnaire

The quantitative part of the research consisted of a questionnaire (appendix 6). Johnson and Christensen (2012:162) indicate that "a questionnaire is a self-report data collection instrument that each research participant fills out as part of a research study". De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2006:166) define a questionnaire as a set of questions on a form which is completed by the respondent in respect of a research project. In this study, a questionnaire is defined as questions designed with a purpose of engaging the identified student participants to provide responses relevant for the study and to answer

the research questions. Literature indicates that researchers use a questionnaire to obtain information about a number of things from participants, e.g., their thoughts, emotions, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, etc. Questionnaires are used to collect the quantitative and mixed data (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:162).

The goal of the questionnaire is to find and understand the opinions of the participants about variables related to the research objectives. The researcher ensured that the items in the questionnaire correspond to the researcher's research objectives. The questionnaire items were mixed. Mixed questionnaires include both open-ended and closed-ended items and are mostly used in an exploratory research design (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:170). Closed-ended or quantitative items focus on getting the participants' responses to standardised items for confirming specific variables that can be measured. Open-ended or qualitative questionnaires, on the other hand, are used to find out how participants think, feel or experience a phenomenon.

The questionnaire design is influenced by the issues of question order, content and format (Van Biljon, 2011:342). Johnson and Christensen (2004:166) also explain that the questions should match the objective of the study. When designing the questionnaire, the following guidelines were adhered to:

- The wording has to be brief, unambiguous, unbiased, specific and objective.
- Everyday language must be used,
- Double-barrelled questions that combine two or more questions in one statement should be decomposed into separate questions.
- Avoid double negatives when asking people to agree or disagree with a statement.
- Avoid sensitive or potentially threatening questions that could conflict with accepted ethical research practices.
- Start with general questions relating to the topic and progress to more specific or detailed subject matter.

The guidelines mentioned above were instrumental in designing the questionnaire for this study in the sense that all questions were clear and the flow of questions went from the general to the specific. The general questions related to the biography of each student and moved to specific questions about the ITM programme. No double negative or double barrel questions were asked and sensitive questions were avoided. This assisted the study to adhere to the ethics of the research.

The design of the questionnaire focused on certain main aspects to answer the research questions. However, prior to the focus areas, the questionnaire started by asking generic questions to all participants to find their personal information in relation to the study and the programme. Following the generic questions, there was a research question which addressed the needs and expectations of students involved in the ITM programme.

The second aspect focused on the quality of the ITM, the third on access and participation and the fourth on the Africanisation of ITM. The afore-mentioned areas of focus relate to the social constructivist theory of learning, Salmon's five stages of e-learning, the empathy theory and the connectivist theory of learning.

The quality aspect looked into issues such as the promise made by Unisa to students as embedded in Unisa's (2013b:9) Annual Report, which indicates that Unisa commits to providing excellent service to all its students, e.g., quality of tutors, quality of tutoring and quality communication, provision of resources for students participating in the tutorial programme, timeous feedback to students, availability of tutors online and in F2F classes and the facilitation of learning in these tutorial classes.

Access and participation to ITM looked into issues of access to internet, Unisa computer laboratories, F2F classes that are within reach of students' residences and access to tutors and lecturers for students to interact with them in their learning journey. These aspects relate to Salmon's five stages of e-learning model with specific reference to stage one of this model which deals with access and motivation. This aspect also relates to the connectivist theory of learning, which advocates for students to have

access to the specialised nodes of information sources and tools for learning to take place (Kop & Hill, 2008:6).

The Africanisation of tutorial support focused on the design of the tutor support programme to address the needs of African students in an African context. This aspect focused on issues of geographical location of tutorial centres, flexibility in terms of language of tutoring, technology skills for students, showcasing of African practices and experiences in a tutorial class, understanding the background and context of an African student and the socialisation of an African child and how he/she learns. This focus area relates to the social constructivist theory of learning which upholds the Ubuntu aspect. It also relates to Salmon's five stages of e-learning model with specific reference to socialisation and information exchange during the interaction of students in a class. Furthermore, the aspect of Africanisation relates to the empathy theory which calls for tutors to empathise with students whose background and digital skills limit them from participating in the programme as expected.

The last focus areas of the questionnaire covered the aspect of the improvement of the ITM and what should be considered in the evaluation of the ITM. All these aspects responded to the research questions that appear in the research problem in Chapter One of the study. Table 5.3 presents the process that was followed to design the questionnaire for this study and how the steps were implemented.

**Table 5.3: Process used to design the questionnaire and steps implemented**

| Steps | Action | Explanation of each step | Implementation of the guidelines to the study |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Establish justification and review of literature | Should a researcher develop a new instrument or use an existing instrument that will be adapted and adjusted to address the objective of the study? | The researcher designed a new instrument for the research project which responded to the objective of the study and research questions. The objectives of the study are listed thus:<br>1. To determine whether the ITM meets Unisa students' teaching and learning needs and expectations. |

| Steps | Action | Explanation of each step | Implementation of the guidelines to the study |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 2. To examine the quality of the ITM as perceived by Unisa students.<br><br>3. To analyse the impact of the implementation of the ITM on student access and participation at Unisa.<br><br>4. To explore ways to Africanise the ITM to address the learning needs of African students.<br><br>5. To develop the improvement strategies for the current ITM to fully cater for Unisa students' learning needs. |
| 2. | Define the objective | Listing the specific objectives that the information will achieve. | A pre-test was conducted using the participants who bear similar characteristics to the subjects that were used in the main interview. |
| 3. | Write items and response scales | Write the items by objective and consider the way results will be analysed once data have been collected. Adhere to the guidelines mentioned in the previous discussion. | The items were written in a way that assisted to respond to research questions. The items used a five-point Likert-type scale of agreement. Each objective was addressed by the following items of the research questions:<br>Students' needs and expectations (B1 to B10 and C11 to C21)<br>The quality of the ITM (D22 to D34)<br>Access and participation in the ITM (E35 to E46)<br>Africanisation of the ITM (F47 to F57)<br>The model of evaluation that would best suit the ITM model (G58-G62)<br>Improvement of the ITM (Section H).<br>The questionnaire is included in Appendix 6<br>The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) data analysis software was used in this study to analyse quantitative data collected through the questionnaire. |

| Steps | Action | Explanation of each step | Implementation of the guidelines to the study |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Conduct pre-test | Conduct a pre-test by asking some thoughtful individuals to read and respond to questions. They will then provide feedback in terms of clarity and the wording of the questions. | The researcher read through the responses to make sense of the issues that the pretest participants raised. This exercise assisted to improve the instruments by modifying some items which led to the finalisation of the instrument. |
| 5 | Revise | Based on the responses of the questions, the items are revised. | After the pre-test was conducted, the items that were challenging or problematic to the pre-test participants were revised and corrections were effected in the instrument before its final usage for the actual data collection. |
| 6. | Data collection | The researcher distributes the questionnaire. | The final instrument was then distributed to students for the actual data collection. |

In developing the questionnaire for the evaluation of the ITM at Unisa, a combination of different scales was appropriate for this study. A scale, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:198), is a series of gradations, levels or values that describe the various degrees of something. These authorities note that scales are used extensively in questionnaires because they allow fairly accurate assessments of beliefs and opinions.

A five-point Likert scale that indicates agreement or disagreement was used to get responses from participants. Students indicated their agreement or disagreement with the statements presented to them on the use of ITM. Closed-ended questions are described by and McMillan and Schumacher (2010:197) as answers written by respondents. They are also referred to as structured, selected responses. Their advantage is that they assist with the collection of data from a large number of people as they require answers that are predetermined by the researcher. Their limitation is that they require the respondents to choose from a limited number of responses as

determined by the researcher. There is basically no liberty to respond openly as these questions primarily provide quantitative data (Johnson & Christensen, 2004:168). However, MMR research helps to counter this gap by considering both qualitative and quantitative parts. In this study, the qualitative part is dominant.

Open forms are open-ended questions which enabled the students to respond in any way that provided qualitative data. The questionnaire was divided into four parts as follows:

- Section A: This part comprised demographic information of students.
- Section B: A five-point Likert scale set of questions were located in this part. It consisted of 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral or undecided, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree.
- Section C: One open-ended question was reserved for this section.

The questionnaire was first pre-tested towards the end of the first semester with a few student participants who were not included in the main data collection. The pretest was conducted for one week. After the pretest was conducted, the items that were challenging to the pretest participants were revised and corrections were effected in the instrument before the data collection. This exercise assisted the researcher to improve and finalise the instrument. The final questionnaire was administered to students during the second semester of 2019 using a LIME survey. The advantage of administering the questionnaire during the second semester was that most students were aware of the tutorial support programme and were in a position to respond to the questions from an informed position that assisted with the evaluation of the ITM.

Kumar (2014:181) indicates that the merits of using a questionnaire as a data collection tool is that it is convenient to use, less expensive and saves time, human and financial resources particularly if an online platform is used to administer the questionnaire because it is less labour intensive. Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen (2006:413) indicate other merits of a questionnaire, which include guaranteed anonymity or confidentiality, respondents may be truthful and provide objective responses to the

questions, a large diverse number of participants could be included in the project and the elimination of problems such as the interviewer's bias. On the contrary, Kumar (2014:182) highlights that the demerits associated with the questionnaire include low participant response especially when identified participants are expected to respond online or via e-mail, self-selecting bias since not everyone receiving the questionnaire will return it or interact with it online and the lack of the opportunity for clarity on issues not understood by respondents. Ary et al. (2006:413) also argue that there is a possibility of respondents misinterpreting the questions given the fact that the researcher is not present to clarify them. Given the researcher's experience working with students and tutors, some of the challenges include procrastination in responding to the questionnaire until the deadline had passed.

From the researcher's experience as a university staff member, "survey fatigue" contributed to students ignoring the questionnaire because they receive many surveys that seek their responses about various services within the university. This caused a low and slow response rate and the misinterpretation of questions by participants.

To mitigate some of the demerits mentioned above, the researcher sent reminders to participants to address the problem of procrastination, late and slow responses. To guard against the misinterpretation of questions, the researcher also ensured that questions were clearly written and easy to understand. Pretesting the questionnaire also assisted to avoid misinterpretation of the questions.

Initially, only the LIME survey was used to administer the questionnaire for a period of two weeks. Due to the poor response rate of students, the second option which was planned for collecting data in this study was used, i.e., an email and face-to-face modes were used to mitigate this challenge. The face-to-face administration of the questionnaire was done after each focus group interview. This conventional method of data collection was appropriate to fill in the gap created by the online questionnaire. The response rate after the conventional method of questionnaire administration was 47.5%.

## 5.9 Data analysis

Once the data have been collected, the researcher needs to create order (Moore, 2002:87). In other words, the researcher enters a process of engaging with the data collected and making sense out of it. Hatch (2002:148) defines data analysis as organising and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques or generate theories. In this study, data analysis was defined as a process of organising and interrogating the collected data to find answers to the research questions. It is a process of reading through and interacting with the data collected from the participants and interrogation them to reveal what participants said about a specific issue under investigation. Vassiljev, (2010:11) posits that, throughout the data analysis process, researchers index and put collected data into as many categories as possible. Gibson (2017:64) emphasises the fact that it is crucial to “get to know your data”.

Data analysis in this study occurred within the quantitative and qualitative approaches and often between the two approaches since the study used a mixed method research design. Data analysis in qualitative research has a number of characteristics. One of the characteristics is that data generation and data analysis occurred simultaneously (Zivera, 2014:114). As stated above, data were collected with the use of four methods, i.e., individual interviews, FGI, questionnaires and document analysis. A discussion of the data analysis strategies used on each of the data sets from these methods follows in the next section.

### 5.9.1 Interview analysis

Data collected through individual interviews, FGIs and document analysis are qualitative in nature. Analysis of qualitative data can be labour intensive since they are collected in high volumes. Individual interviews and FGIs were analysed through the computer-assisted qualitative data programme, CAQDAS, using the Atlas.ti software of Windows 8.0. Through the Atlas.ti software, tape-recorded interviews were transcribed into MS Word documents, saved as rich text format (rtf) documents, and then imported into the

Atlas.ti software where they were converted into hermeneutic units of primary documents See appendix 18. Replacement of the codes that were too general was done. Thirty codes were identified from the transcribed data. Data were then organised into seven code groups which translated into five themes. To analyse qualitative data through computer software such as this does not mean that the computer programme completes the analysis. Hence, the researcher still had to make sense of the data segments down to the formation of families and themes and then she interpreted the data and carefully chose the verbatim statements that supported the presentation of the findings.

### 5.9.2 Data analysis for document analysis

Bowen (2009:33) indicates that "document analysis involves skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation". As guided by the process described by Bowen (2009:32), analysis of document analysis was done as follows:

**Step 1:** The researcher took a closer look at the selected data.

**Step 2:** Codes were derived from the three types of documents mentioned above. The codes were grouped into categories. Categories, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:376), represent major ideas that are used to describe the meaning of similarly coded data.

**Step 3:** Three themes were constructed from the categories.

**Step 4:** In representing descriptions and themes, the narrative passage was used to convey the findings of the analysis. This was done in the form of a discussion.

### 5.9.3 Questionnaire analysis

Data collected through the questionnaires are quantitative in nature and are analysed differently from the qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:156). Quantitative data analysis involves techniques such as the frequencies of variables, differences between

variables, statistical tests designed to estimate the significance of the results and the probability that they did not occur by chance. This is basically done by counting how often something appears in the data and comparing one measurement with others (Hancock, 2002:16). In quantitative research, data are analysed manually or through the help of computer software. In this study, the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) data analysis software version 26 was used to analyse the quantitative data collected through the questionnaires. Statistical techniques performed include frequency tables (counts and percentages) to describe the data and charts that were generated using a Microsoft excel 2020 and reliability analysis (Cronbach alpha) was performed in this regard. Quantitative research is primarily involved with data collection using instruments or questionnaires designed to measure the construct of interests. The reliability of these instruments in measuring the construct is crucial. Cronbach alpha is therefore valuable as a technique to measure the reliability/ internal consistency of the instrument in measuring the construct/s.

## 5.10 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research means that the research findings are a true reflection of reality (Zimbiti, 2016:101). According to Cypress (2017:257), reliability and validity are the two factors that any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analysing results and judging its quality. When dealing with issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research, the researcher should address the question of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. These methods are used to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research.

It is equally imperative for a researcher to be concerned about the factors that govern the trustworthiness of the study in quantitative research and these factors include external validity and internal validity, reliability, and objectivity of the study. Cypress (2017) notes that there are four criteria that were established as benchmarks for quality based on the identification of the aspects of trustworthiness or rigour that are relevant to MMR studies. These are truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. Each is

briefly discussed below.

### 5.10.1 Truth value

#### 5.10.1.1 Truth value in qualitative designs

Truth value is established differently in qualitative and quantitative designs. In qualitative research, truth value is dependent on credibility which is used to establish trustworthiness or rigour. According to Mays (2017:193 citing Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this is done by following certain procedures that the researcher could employ to increase credibility in the study, namely:

- Prolonged engagement with participants to learn their way of life and build trust that would assist the researcher to deal with any misunderstandings of his/her questions and build a common understanding between the participants and the researcher.
- Peer review or debriefing is used to make sure none of the researchers are using their biased opinion. During this process, the researcher asks for a second opinion to examine the study and determine if the results are congruent with the data.
- Negative case analysis is used to show that not all data will provide the same result. This improves the credibility of a study because it shows that the researchers are looking over the cases thoroughly and it allows researchers to present information from a study that does not align with other themes, patterns, and overall results.
- It is important to store data collected safely. This is done to refer and compare them to other future studies as this will show credibility. This procedure is done through a referential adequacy method.
- Member checking is used for participants to review the data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions. This allows qualitative researchers to examine the overall accuracy of the study and verifying data results.

#### 5.10.1.2 Truth value in quantitative designs

As indicated in the preceding paragraphs, credibility is established differently in quantitative research. This study employed internal validity methods to establish trustworthiness and rigour. Quantitative researchers evaluate trustworthiness by how well the threats to internal validity have been controlled and the validity of the instruments and measurements used in a study. This is done by the researcher who analyses data through using statistical test measures.

In this study, reliability analysis Cronbach alpha was performed to measure the internal consistency of the items in measuring the constructs students' needs in the ITM as appear in figure 7.1, students' expectations of the ITM as reflected in figure 7.2., quality of the ITM as perceived by students (see figure 7.3), access and participation to the ITM (see figure 7.4), the Africanisation of the ITM (see figure 7.5), and aspects related to the improvement of the ITM (see figure 7.6).

The thesis was uploaded to the Turnitin software to validate the originality of the content (see Appendix 19 for a Turnitin digital report). Over and above, the thesis was edited to ensure that there are no grammatical and linguistic shortcomings (see the editor's letter in Appendix 17).

#### 5.10.1.3 The truth value in Mixed Methods data analysis

To meet the true value criterion in the evaluation of the effectiveness of ITM, the researcher used peer review or debriefing techniques whereby the data collection instruments were given to various persons or colleagues to review prior to the distribution thereof. Prolonged engagements were promoted by inviting regional staff members and academic staff to consult with the researcher from time to time to ascertain facts about their settings, certain processes and procedures. They were expected to provide feedback on issues that affect the effective implementation of the ITM in their specific colleges telephonically, via e-mail or by Scopia. The triangulation of results was also done whereby results obtained through the individual interviews were checked against the results obtained through the FGIs and questionnaires, as well as

document analysis. The precise recording and literal descriptions of the participants' behaviours in specific situations assisted in enhancing the validity of the interviews. Member checking was employed by inviting the staff members to review the interview data transcripts to enhance their validity and credibility (Guba, 1985 cited by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002:14).

### 5.10.2 Applicability

The second criterion used to establish trustworthiness in research is transferability, which means that for the researcher to be able to generalise, the findings should be applied to other contexts and settings. This method is only applicable to qualitative research.

Quantitative research uses the method of external validity to establish trustworthiness. This is done by generalising the research sample to the larger population. In the context of this study, applicability was established by providing a detailed description of the regional support service centres and hubs, students, academic staff and regional support staff, as well as the procedures used to collect data. Quantitatively, the researcher looked into the factors that may affect external validity and generalisation by focusing on the students, and academic and regional staff and ensured that the sample size was adequate enough to represent the entire population of the three sets of participants.

### 5.10.3 Consistency

Consistency is achieved through dependability. This method is used by qualitative researchers to ensure consistency in the research findings for audit purposes. Consistency in this study was promoted by analysing and reporting the exact words and expressions used by the students using the ITM and staff implementing the ITM at Unisa. This was done by explaining the experiences, practices and perspectives of all participants using their exact words. The methods used to collect data, the analysis and interpretation thereof were described in detail by the researcher. Reliability was

promoted through the testing of the interviewees during the process of interviews and providing feedback after a certain instrument over a period of a week and thereafter the content, format and scales were improved and later incorporated into the final instrument.

In quantitative research consistency was achieved through test-retest reliability whereby the researcher administered the instrument to the same participants on two occasions to assist determing the test-retest reliability of the instrument. Pre-test and post-test using the same questionnaire as a data collection instrument was conducted. According to (Mare 2007:215), administering the instrument to the same subjects on two or more occasions would assist to determine the test-rest reliability of an instrument. The results of the first data collection are compared with the results of the second or third data collection by calculating a coefficient.

### 5.10.4 Conformity

Shenton (2004:72) defines conformity as “the degree to which the study’s findings are a result of the experiences and ideas of the participants rather than the preferences of the researcher”. In this study, this criterion was fulfilled by ensuring that raw data collected in the form of individual interviews and FGIs, audio-recordings, document analysis and questionnaire responses were stored in a safe place. This is what Lincoln and Guba (1985 cited by Mumanyi, 2014:74) calls an audit trail. An audit trail assisted in confirming that the research is an accurate representation of the views expressed by the participants. The researcher would make these records available at any given time should they be requested.

## 5.11 Ethical considerations

Ethical behaviour and application are essential in research. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:117) indicate that ethics are concerned with beliefs about what is right or wrong from a moral perspective. Collecting data through any method mentioned above may involve some ethical issues in relation to the participants, the researcher, colleagues or

people to whom to present the reports or findings. Researchers need to consider that the moral accuracy of the responses from the research participants, as a basic concept in qualitative research, is trust (Hennie, 2010:44). However, ethical issues should be interpreted in the light of the research context and of other values at stake. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:117) provide guidelines and principles that assisted the researcher to ensure ethical conduct during the process of research. These are briefly described subsequently.

### 5.11.1 Full disclosure or deception

Researchers should generally be open and honest with participants about all aspects of the study. During the data collection process, the researcher was open and informed the students and staff about the purpose of the research and how it would contribute towards the tutor programmes under evaluation. This was done before the commencement of data collection.

### 5.11.2 Informed consent

It is considered unethical to collect data without the prior knowledge of the participants and their expressed willingness and informed consent. The researcher therefore sought permission from Unisa through the Professional Administrative Research Committee (PARC) for students and staff to participate in the study (See Appendix 7 about permission to conduct research at the University and Appendix 12 indicating the ethics certificate granted to the researcher). After the permission had been given by Unisa, the researcher also explained to the participants that all interview proceedings would be recorded and the information would be kept safe (as indicated in Appendices 1-5). Students and staff were also requested to sign a form which indicated their willingness to participate in the research and gave consent for the recording of the interviews. Participants were also informed that, should they want to discontinue their participation in the research project, they could do that at any time.

### 5.11.3 No harm or risk to participants

Research should never result in physical or mental discomfort, harm or injury to the participants. Harm may be revealing information that may result in embarrassment or danger to home life and students' performance. In the current study, questions seeking information which may cause discomfort, anxiety, harassment and dehumanisation were avoided at all cost.

### 5.11.4 Voluntary participation

This means that participants cannot be compelled, coerced or required to participate in the research. Participants were therefore requested to sign a participant information sheet which stated that their participation was absolutely voluntary (see Appendices 8-11). McMillan and Schumacher (2010:118) indicate that this happens when participants are informed about the benefits of participating in the research. Given the fact that participants are willingly sharing information with the researcher, it is not unethical to incentivise them. What is unethical is giving them incentives prior to data collection. As a result, the researcher did not give any incentives to the students or staff for participating in the research project. Due to the fact that the researcher conducted the FGIs, a light lunch was served after the meetings.

### 5.11.5 Privacy

This means that access to the participants' characteristics, responses, behaviour and other information is restricted to the researcher. The researcher ensured privacy by using three practices, i.e., anonymity, confidentiality and appropriate storing of data. To ensure anonymity in this research, the researcher did not disclose any link between data collected and the participants. For purposes of confidentiality, only the researcher had access to the data and the participants' names. All data collected were stored on the Microsoft One Drive folder which is the platform given to the Unisa staff member and they were only accessible to the researcher as they were protected by a password. No person would be able to access the folder unless a password is shared with him/her.

## 5.12 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was on the research design and methodology. The study followed a mixed method and exploratory case study design. Individual and FGIs, questionnaires and document analysis were presented as the research methods used to collect data for this study. The discussion of the methods covered the definition of each method, its design, merits and demerits. Steps were undertaken to promote trustworthiness. The chapter also accounted for the ethics of the study. A detailed account of the methods used in the study enabled the researcher to focus on the plan of data gathering. The next chapter presents and interprets the qualitative research findings.

# CHAPTER SIX
# PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS FROM THE QUALITATIVE DATA

## 6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and present the findings from the study that sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the ITM in the context of Unisa. The study used mixed methods research to collect data from students and staff members distributed across the Unisa Regional campuses in South Africa and staff based at Unisa's main campus. Data were collected through individual interviews with Unisa staff, focus groups with students in the identified regional service centres and agencies, questionnaires were administered to Unisa students who are taught via the ITM and relevant documents about the ITM were examined. Qualitative data were analysed using Atlas.ti version 8 and quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 26. The analysis of quantitative data is presented in Chapter 7. The findings which emanated from the collected data responded to the questions stated as follows:

- How does the ITM meet Unisa students' needs and expectations?
- What is the quality of the ITM as perceived by these students?
- What is the impact of the implementation of the ITM on student access and participation at Unisa?
- How can the ITM be Africanised to address the learning needs of African students?
- How can the ITM be improved to fully cater for Unisa students' needs and expectations?

The findings are reported per categories of data sets.

## 6.2 Findings from individual interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Unisa staff from various departments

(see Table 5.2) to obtain the views of staff members using a form of a dialogue regarding the ITM's effectiveness at Unisa. Twenty-one participants (RACs, TOs, HFLs, tutors, lecturers, ASCs and HR Officers) based in the regional service centres, hubs and agencies, and academic departments were targeted for individual interviews (see section 5.9.1). However, due to challenges experienced at the university during the time of interviews, some participants were not available for this exercise, and 17 staff members were interviewed.

The findings were clustered into themes using Atlas.ti software 8. Table 6.1 presents the five main themes that emerged from the analysed data as guided by the research questions listed in the introduction of this chapter.

**Table 6.1: Themes generated from sub-research questions**

| Themes | Sub-research questions | Themes identified |
|---|---|---|
| Thme 1 | How does the new ITM meet Unisa students' needs and expectations? | Sudents' needs and expectations |
| Theme 2 | What is the quality of the new ITM as perceived by these students? | The quality of the ITM |
| Theme 3 | What is the impact of the implementation of the ITM on student access and participation at Unisa? | Students' access to ITM and participation |
| Theme 4 | How can the ITM be Africanised to address the learning needs of African students? | Africanisation of the ITM |
| Theme 5 | How can the current ITM be improved to fully cater for Unisa students' needs and expectations? | Improvement of the ITM |

### 6.2.1 Theme 1: Students' needs and expectations

The theme on students' needs and expectations presents what students hoped to achieve and what was essential for them as they used the ITM. Three sub-themes emerged under this theme which assisted with the presentation of the findings, i.e., daily class attendance and teaching of the content, availability of tutors anytime online, prompt feedback from tutors and continuous communication between the institution and students.

#### 6.2.1.1 Daily class attendance and teaching of the content

This sub-theme relates to the physical engagement with the tutor and module content. According to Participant 14 (Ppt14), "they expect to have an everyday time-table for tutorial classes that are conducted on a daily basis like campus-based universities". This expectation is an indication of a lack of knowledge on how distance learning (DL) operates. Students were not aware that DL is different from a contact-based institution where the day-to-day tuition is received by students. For them, DL is similar to any university that would provide a lecturer to teach them as if they were in a basic education environment hence ppt13 indicated that:

> "They expect someone to stand in front and explain the content to them in detail, hence they demand classes even in the non-high risk modules … They expect to find people who will break down things for them and show them the ropes from the beginning till the end. They want to pass, that's all they are here for".

These comments speak to conventional mode of student support which occurs face-to-face only where most of the work is done by the tutor. Ppt6 emphasised that:

> "they are not here to get ingredients to mix and make a cake instead they expect to find a ready-made cake fully baked and ripe, ready to be eaten".

The goal of the ITM is to support and not to teach as expected by students, however, according to Ppt13, *"they expect teaching more than support".*

This is a clear indication that students are comfortable in the traditional support which demands very little from them compared to facilitated learning which requires them to do more work and expect less from the tutor.

#### 6.2.1.2 Availability of tutors anytime online

Availability of tutors online was another students' expectation cited by participants. This expectation relates to tutor presence. Ppt4 stated in this regard: *"Students expect support in terms of availability of tutors at any time online".* This was corroborated by Ppt6 that *"they expect to get someone who will talk to them when they log online".* To students, availability meant that tutors are available 24 hours a day and would respond to their queries at any time of the day or night when they post something online. Others expected even more from tutors, *"they expect tutors to give answers for assignments"* (Ppt3). These findings reveal that students had a different understanding of a tutor's role in the ITM. Furthermore, the findings need the attention of the ITM to clarify the role of tutors in an environment like Unisa.

#### 6.2.1.3 Prompt feedback from tutors

This sub-theme focused on the academic needs of students. From the participants, it was clear that students made use of the ITM as a support base because academic support was essential to them, as Ppt2 stated: "*The basic need is academic support from tutors".* Academic support involves tutor's response to students. According to Ppt7*, "tutors need to provide prompt feedback to students so that they are able to progress to the next level".* Ppt4 shared the same sentiments on the issue of feedback stating that *"the response time is prolonged, tutors delay to provide feedback to students".* These responses seem to suggest that students could not progress in their studies due to non-responsiveness or delayed feedback of tutors.

#### 6.2.1.4 Continuous communication between the institution and students

MyUnisa is a tool that is used to engage with students using the ITM. Coupled with MyUnisa, Unisa uses MyLife e-mails to communicate important information to students.

Participants indicated that Unisa was failing them in this area. Students are expected to read their e-mails frequently to keep up to date with what is happening in the ITM and the university at large. Failure to do so results in communication breakdown. The findings reveal that students need to play their part as the ITM plays its part, as Ppt7 expressed that "*students also do not read their MyLife emails where most of the institutional communication goes to. Their MyLife emails are not linked to their private emails so that communication can flow easily".* They felt that tutors took longer than expected to respond to their questions, *"communication is not good and prompt; tutors take forever to respond when you have posed a question"* (Ppt5). Students felt that support is therefore not reliable so that they could succeed in their studies. Ppt10 was of the view that *"they need reliable support, full support of face-to-face and online tutors".* Participants' comments suggest that tutor support provided to students is not reliable because tutors fail to respond within the time stipulated by Unisa to respond to students. This is reflected in the comments made by Ppt8: *"MyUnisa is used to communicate to students, tutors give themselves 48 hours turnaround time. However, Unisa is failing when it comes to this area".*

It can be noticed from the findings that the participants had mixed views about the ITM meeting the expectations and needs of students. Some felt that the university was not meeting the students' needs while others felt that the ITM partially met the students' needs and expectations. Distance learning (DL) students should be independent and not rely on the tutors as Ppt10 commented: *"Expectations are not met to those who are too dependent on the university".* Ppt14 felt that *"the ITM partially meets the needs of students when it provides some modules face-to-face and others online*". On the contrary, Ppt8 was of the view that *"the university is not meeting students' needs because modules that students struggle with are not provided in a blended mode because some are only available online and not on face-to-face basis".* Also, Ppt9 had a different opinion, indicating *that* "*the model of face-to-face does meet the needs but for online it's difficult to say this because of limited participation from students".* The same sentiments were echoed by Ppt14:

> "We partially meet their needs in terms of module provision because some register for five modules and only receive support for two modules on face-to-face and the rest may be online which they do not like or are not familiar with".

The fact that the purpose of ITM is not focused on teaching students suggests that participants' expectations were not met by ITM. According to Ppt8 and Ppt3, students' needs were met whereas their expectations were not. This suggests that ITM does not support students fully as they expect. Students expect to be taught, however, the ITM is not meant to teach anyone but to support students who are studying with Unisa. The findings reveal that the students and the institution's expectations do not converge, as Ppt6 argued: *"Their expectations do not meet the offerings of this institution. We have different expectations from each other hence, I say their expectations are not met".* Ppt10 recommended that *"students should be made aware of such practices before they register. A comparative environment podcast on YouTube should be posted which describes the two institutions, i.e., a campus based and ODEL campus".* This is supported by Ppt7 who indicted that *"I know for a fact that regions conduct students' orientations and this should continue. This assists students to understand the type of institution they intend to register with".*

In concluding this theme and based on the above findings, students' expectations were not met because what they expected from the programme was not in line with the ITM as explained by Unisa (2012). Teaching is not part of the ITM. However, their needs were partly met because the university tried to provide for the needs of students online and some high-risk modules were offered via a face-to-face mode hence, the participants believed that the university partly met the needs of students who wanted to be supported face-to-face especially in modules with high failure rates.

### 6.2.2 Theme 2: The quality of the ITM

Regarding the quality of the ITM, there were varying views from the participants. According to them, the quality of the ITM was determined by a number of things such as the quality of tutors recruited for the programme. According to Ppt5*, "Quality measure*

*starts from recruitment stage".* The quality of tutorials offered to students, according to Ppt5, was of high quality. Ppt6 mentioned the aspect of quality communication with students and indicated: *"Quality for me starts with a proper communication strategy used by Unisa to communicate to Unisa students. Why I am saying that, it is because we will not win if our communication is not good".* These comments suggest that if the intention with the ITM is to provide quality tutorials to students, the university should employ quality tutors who will provide quality tutor support.

#### 6.2.2.1 The quality of tutors

The quality of tutors recruited and appointed for facilitating learning through the ITM determines the quality of tutorials offered to students as indicated in the statement above by Ppt5. The findings indicate that there are processes and procedures put in place to guide the recruitment and appointment of tutors in the institution. Structures are in place to ensure that quality is applied in all stages of recruitment up to the evaluation of each tutor within each college. Ppt6 indicated that:

> "the task team was set [up] to look at tutor appointments, standardisation, monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure that everything is properly managed within the college. Everyone is involved in the tutor recruitment process".

On the other hand, Ppt15 stated:

> "Each college has a qualification framework and the tutor recruitment is done by HR however, no interviews are done. The process only uses qualification if the tutor qualifies. The challenge with this process is how do we know if the tutor is able to facilitate learning since this is a core function that she must perform?"

Other participants submitted that, for the university to recruit and keep quality tutors, it needs to reconsider the remuneration scale for the F2F tutors. According to Ppt3 and Ppt7:

> "there is a huge gap between the e-tutors and F2F tutors; the scale of F2F tutors should be increased since their tutorial sessions are more hectic and they travel to

the venue to see students".

This finding suggests that the qualification possessed by a tutor is the only determining criterion for employment. However, there is no determinant that measures the skills that the tutor possesses to perform the specific task he/she is employed for. This is a gap that may create a serious quality challenge in the ITM. The university needs to revisit this process to assess the facilitation skills possessed by the potential candidate tutor. In addition to this, the university needs to review the salary scale of the F2F tutors to retain quality tutors in the system.

#### 6.2.2.2 The quality of tutoring

According to the findings, the involvement of the lecturer contributes towards quality tutoring. If the lecturer is involved and works closely with the tutor, quality is expected because tutoring is monitored online. If the lecturer is not involved in the ITM, the quality of tutoring could be compromised. Ppt1 stated:

> *"The involvement of lecturers is very important in the sense that the lecturer can go through the information that is posted by the tutor and confirm its relevancy however if the lecturer is not involved there is a compromise of quality … Lecturers are minimally involved in this process and this only compromises quality because they are the ones who must check the quality of personnel employed for tutoring, I am speaking for my college of course".*

The involvement of the module lecturer includes monitoring the quality of the content posted online by the tutor. This practice contributes towards students' motivation to participate and receive quality tutorials because tutors do what is expected of them in the ITM. However, not all students receive quality tutoring which is determined by the tutor's presence online or through face-to-face attendance of classes by tutors. Ppt5 and Ppt7 are of the view that every student has a different journey and can narrate it as informed by experience in the ITM. For instance, Ppt5 stated:

> *"Not all students get value for money because it is dependent how good and active each tutor is, and how involved the lecturer is. One group may get value for money*

*and the other group might not get it because tutors differ. That is why some students decide not to participate and end up dropping out of online tutor support" (Ppt5).*

Ppt7, however, indicated that "every student has a story to tell, so some can even single out some tutors who contributed in their learning journey and [they] succeeded because of this support".

The quality of tutoring is also evaluated whereby lecturers evaluate tutors through the work done online. Ppt5 commented that "the e-tutors are evaluated formatively through monitoring report on a weekly basis".

The findings on the quality of tutoring are centred on the involvement of the module lecturer in the process of tutoring. If the lecturer was actively involved, positive feedback was expected. This suggests that working in silos did not benefit the ITM however, a team approach would be of great benefit for the student, tutor and the lecturer.

#### 6.2.2.3 Quality of communication

Quality of communication is understood as communication that is clear, proper and constant. The participants admitted that, for tutorial support to serve its purpose, there should be quality communication between students and all those who are involved in the effective running of the ITM.

*"The issue of proper and clear communication is important. I ensure that there is proper communication between the tutor and students so that I am able to address what the lecturer is expecting me to address to students during the class" (Ppt8).*

Systems put in place for communication should be of quality and work for all stakeholders in the ITM. Ppt17 expressed that:

*"sms communication system is utilised to ensure that the content of communication is correct, e.g., tutorial cancellation and commencement of tutorial classes. F910 is very good and I commend the initiators of the function". (F910 is a communication system that was designed by the regions in collaboration with ICT to assist with*

*communicating tutorial related matters to students.)*

If there is no quality communication, quality service is compromised because there will be many assumptions instead of facts. Ppt8 added: *"As a tutor I ensure quality service to students. The issue of proper and clear communication is important to me". Ppts 4, 14 and 16 strongly recommended that Tutorial Letter 101 should explain briefly how F2F tutorial classes work, where students can access them and how to get a time table for tutorial classes. An application is needed to provide easy access to the tutorial support.*

From the findings in this sub-theme, it could be concluded that communication between students, regional staff, lecturers and tutors is crucial. These findings reveal that the ITM should ensure that proper communication systems are set up and used to address the needs of students.

In summary, it could be said that the success of the ITM depends on the quality of tutors employed to offer quality tutorials face-to-face and online. The quality of tutorials is dependent on the involvement of the module lecturer who will support the tutor to provide quality tutoring. This suggests that these stakeholders should work together to provide a positive learning experience for students.

### 6.2.3 Theme 3: Students' access to ITM and participation

The participants shared rich but varying views about their experiences regarding this aspect. The views mostly revolved around interaction, resources and stakeholders' involvement.

#### 6.2.3.1 Interaction

In the sub-theme of interaction, participants provided varying views. Some felt that tutors were doing their best to encourage students to participate and interact online. Such tutors are also active online and respond to students' queries. Ppt4 stated:

*"Some tutors always have students online. These are tutors who are engaging and*

*speak the language of the students, encouraging them and respond to their questions or queries".*

Students differ; some are outspoken and others are shy to express themselves in a public setting, hence, they found it difficult to engage with their tutors in another language. This was expressed by Ppt2 who submitted that *"students do not interact with the tutors because communication is difficult to say what they want to convey to tutors online and face-to-face students are shy to speak in class".* However, Ppt6 was of the view that students' interactions were informed by the examination period, and indicated that:

*"students only interact online during exams because they want to pass and want answers for exams. They only want the output and they don't want to go through the process and they are not even penalised for that".*

The issue of participation and interaction seems to be a challenge the way it is viewed and understood by some people within the institution. Students logon to online, view and close the platform and others engage with other students. According to Ppt5:

*"Opening and viewing cannot be classified as participation. What is considered as participation is when a student gets online, reads and writes something for the tutor or other students to read and respond if needed. Other colleges consider opening and viewing as participation".*

Ppt3 stated that participation should be monitored closely and improved because other students just log and view without posting anything online:

*"Some students are just lurkers and are not interacting online. They open and view the discussion forum. Those who are interacting assist a lot because sometimes the tutor takes too long to respond".*

The use of social media to motivate participation and interaction was also highlighted. These views were expressed by Ppt8:

*"We need to look at how we use social media to enhance participation in class and*

*online. How can we incorporate WhatsApp in our teaching and learning as it helps us to enhance participation online and face-to-face? Sometimes I play a silent observer online as a tutor and on WhatsApp and leave them to interact on their own and solve problems and intervene when necessary. This gives them sufficient time to interact among themselves".*

Ppt12 stated that "tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them clear before they start using it with students. Students will post questions, and thereafter will sum up." Some participants were totally against the use of WhatsApp and indicated that it is not safe at all. "I discourage the use of WhatsApp because they are not protected when they work in this social space. A lot of misconduct happens. Students are not safe in that space" (Ppt5).

Interaction, according to the participants, should not only happen between students but between the tutors and lecturers as well. Other participants recommended that the tutors of the same module should form an online group that would assist them to be on the same level of understanding the content and to increase the tutorial quality. Ppt15 submitted: "They should create the same understanding, have a tutor-tutor interaction where they tutor the same module, even if it is a WhatsApp group". Ppt12 supported this by indicating that "Community of Practice (COP) for tutors of the same module should come together online and share the best practices that would improve tutoring". Ppt2 added that this "COP should be joined by the lecturers so that they are on the same page".

The findings in this sub-theme show that some tutors are doing very well in the activity of interacting with students. Students are also trying their best to interact with one another however, there are challenging issues that prevent them from interacting as reported in the findings. Such issues cannot be ignored because they could have a negative impact on the programme. This includes the use of WhatsApp to enhance interaction in the ITM.

#### 6.2.3.2 Access to resources

Participation is hindered or improved by a number of things such as availability, usability and reliability of resources provided by the institution. The strength of the ITM is that it provides resources. However, the weakness is that resources are not always usable and reliable. This is reflected in the comments of Ppt6, who indicated:

> *"Unisa has made resources accessible to students but the accessibility should be measured with the usability. The two are power twins. It doesn't help to make resources accessible if they are not used by students. Hence, Academic Support Coordinators (ASCs) and Digital Literacy Advisors (DLAs) work together to train students on Microsoft packages that will enable them to do their online modules".*

Awareness campaigns in the resources available at Unisa should be done vigorously for ITM students to use such resources. According to Ppt6, *"Unisa has a lot of resources however, they are not well communicated to students so that they use them as intended"*. With some resources, it is not the question of accessibility but of reliability, for example, the internet, which is available at all Unisa campuses but not always available to students. Ppt16 indicated in this regard: *"Wi-Fi is available but not reliable because it gets on and off, same as the MyUnisa platform which is not user friendly to navigate and it is changed making it difficult for students to access My Modules".*

These findings suggest that access to resources is found to be a strength of the ITM, while the non-functional resources are categorised under weaknesses. The university should find ways to manage the non-functional resources in the ITM. The question is, do maintenance officers do a quality job?

#### 6.2.3.3 Stakeholders' involvement

Academics are stakeholders of the ITM and play a role in ensuring that tutors are doing what they are expected to do by the institution. The findings show that lecturers' involvement in the tutoring programme has an impact on the tutors' performance. This is reflected in the comments by Ppt7, who indicated that:

*"the lecturer's dedication and involvement to support the tutor plays a very big role because if the lecturer has less interest and [is] less involved, the tutor tends to relax because she knows that the lecturer is not interested in the tutor support programme".*

Regional staff are ITM stakeholders because they provide digital skills to students and enable them to do their assignments and online modules. Ppt14 highlighted that:

*"some students who are doing online modules do not have computer literacy skills. As a result, Digital Literacy Advisors (DLAs) in the regional centres provide them with computer training so that they are able to engage online with the modules".*

The above findings reveal that a team approach benefited stakeholders because it functions effectively and efficiently to provide support to students.

### 6.2.4 Theme 4: Africanisation of the ITM

This theme addresses four sub-themes which are students from rural areas, exodus to urban areas, removal of barriers and facilitation of learning. The purpose of this theme is that the ITM should address itself to the plight of African students who make up majority of the university's student body and may come from poor backgrounds.

#### 6.2.4.1 Students from rural and remote areas

Students from rural areas suffer the most if ITM does not provide them with the support they need. All students are given a blanket approach to academic support through the ITM. This is reflected in the responses below. Ppt1 indicated:

*"Students coming from rural areas are struggling the most. As an African institution, a lot is expected from us in order to meet the needs of such students. A student from a first world country, urban area or third world country is treated there the same and not reflecting the elements of Ubuntu and uniqueness to meet individual profile's needs".*

This suggests that the ITM needs different approaches to support students from rural

and remote areas who struggle to access online facilities due to connectivity and internet problems. An approach is required which would consider their background and assist them to feel that the university understands their dynamics and cares for them. Ppt6 submitted: *"The model does not consider the background of each students that enters the system, it treats everyone the same irrespective of the background".*

The findings in this sub-theme call for the ITM to find an appropriate approach to address the needs of the rural and remote Unisa students so that they feel part of the Unisa community.

#### 6.2.4.2 Exodus to urban areas

Students from rural areas should be provided with proper resources such as internet access and accessible venues. Such provision will enable them to stay and study in the comfort of their homes, as they prefer, given the ODeL ness of the university. The non-provision of appropriate resources and the limitation of the ITM provision causes these students to move to the urban centres where academic support resources are concentrated. This adds to their costs but, most importantly, it means the Unisa's ODeLness, accompanied by the ITM is brought to question. Ppt9 stated that *"some students are comfortable staying in the deep rural areas and want to study staying there. However, they must be given the support they need to succeed*". Ppt10 responded as follows about the concentration of support centres in the cities:

> *"Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resources and access to internet and Wi-Fi? But people in the rural areas do not have such. Unisa must rethink this strategy; we need to put centres in poor areas where students have difficulty accessing these resources".*

The reason is that students move to cities in numbers to access resources to support their learning. In light of the above comments, participants were concerned that Unisa is not capacitating African students residing in remote and rural areas to meet the challenges brought by the fourth industrial revolution, as Ppt6 commented: *"Africanisation and the 4$^{th}$ industrial revolution do not meet. Most students move from*

*rural areas to cities in order to access a number of supports that will help them to succeed in their studies".* This begs the question: Can the institution rise to the fourth industrial revolution phase when it has not yet provided the means to reach this portion of its student body?

The findings above reveal that, until something is done about the ITM regarding the provision of resources to the centres in the rural and remote areas, students will continue to move from such places in search of centres that will respond to their resource needs.

#### 6.2.4.3 Removal of barriers to learning

The findings from this sub-theme indicate that students encounter impediments that affect their learning. This includes not having personal computers and other devices that will assist them to access the internet when they are not on campus. Ppt4 emphasised that *"we cannot expect students to access internet if they do not have gadgets with big screen so for them to read properly, like really".* The element of exclusion through the infrastructure provided by Unisa was raised by Ppt8 who felt that video conferencing (VC) and internet infrastructure excludes students who live in rural areas:

> *"Does the infrastructure include our student because, when we conduct online classes and VC classes, if the infrastructure is not well off in rural areas, such students are automatically excluded from the support that Unisa wants to provide for them. Students need access to internet".*

Students also travel long distances to reach resource-rich centres. This is a barrier to learning linked to their socio-economic status. Affordability is a challenge to them which can be understood in the context of "free education" which students call for. This suggests that there is a gap that needs the attention of the institution, even though it lies on the national scope. "*Distance travelled by students who are expected to come and attend classes is a serious challenge" (Ppt14).* Ppt15 indicated:

> *"Mpumalanga is a very big province and there are many students in this region.*

*There are only two centres, i.e., Nelspruit and Middleburg. Unisa needs to do its analysis well and establish another centre in order to increase access for students".*

These findings show that the university need to bridge this gap, i.e., to remove the barriers impeding the support for rural students.

#### 6.2.4.4 Facilitation of learning

The findings in this area suggest that the facilitation of learning through the ITM should start from the traditional approach and gradually move to the modern way of facilitation. According to the participants, the provision of relevant resources will assist students to transform from the traditional to the modern facilitation of learning. Ppt7 indicated that:

*"students should start with the traditional way of learning and slowly move to the modern way of learning or engaging with the learning environment and participants. The right resources should be given to students so that they find it interesting and easy to engage".*

Ppt4 also stated that "students should be taught for the first few classes before facilitation should be done in order for them to adjust easily in the ODEL context".

The findings suggest that students from rural areas need to be carefully guided by the tutors through teaching to understand the content before they move to facilitated learning.

To summarise this theme, it is evident that the Africanisation of the ITM could be achieved by solving the challenges faced by Unisa students coming from rural and remote areas. The submissions made by the participants suggest that ITM should work on removing distance barriers faced by these students, treat them as part of the Unisa community and understand that they do not have the skills that students coming from urban areas do. This is another role that tutors can play.

### 6.2.5 Theme 5: Improvement of the ITM

All programmes have limitations which can be improved as the programme continues to run. The ITM was developed and implemented in 2012. During its implementation, gaps were identified that need to be closed to meet students' needs. This theme is made up of seven sub-themes, i.e., involvement and relationship enhancement between tutors and academics in the ITM implementation, contracting of tutors, collaboration and partnership, ITM systems, reward for participation, enhanced communication and HR spaces, processes and procedures. The findings indicated that the programme has some gaps that need to be filled to assist with the smooth running of the ITM.

#### 6.2.5.1 Involvement and relationship enhancement between tutors and academics in the ITM implementation

The participants felt that academics did little to support tutors and update them on issues relating to their modules. Ppt8 is a tutor who felt that tutors and lecturers need to work together to ensure that students are supported as intended by the ITM. Ppt8 therefore stated:

> *"To enhance this relationship so that lecturers are able to engage with us with the latest developments within the module e.g. when the legislation has changed, accounting standards that changes, lecturers are the ones who should call an online meeting or VC and talk about these issues so that we, as tutors, are able to take this further to our students in class. We need to keep abreast with the latest developments and be on par with what is happening on the ground regarding the module we are tutoring".*

Ppt7 indicated that *"we must evaluate the interaction between lecturers and tutors".* This suggests that interaction is lacking between tutors and lecturers hence the need to evaluate it to find ways to enhance this relationship. Some of the participants did not take tutors as seriously as lecturers. According to Ppt4, some academics indicated that tutor activities expected from them were too demanding and a waste of money:

> *"Tutoring should be recognised and be taken seriously at Unisa especially by*

*academics. Some academics do not see the relevance of the tutor support. They feel that it is too much work and is a waste of money".*

The findings call for academic support to tutors who are performing academic tasks as Ppt5 noted:

*"Academics need to support tutors both face-to-face and e-tutors. Let us be accessible and available to students … Change the minds of academics to view tutors as a group of people who are milking the cow and add no value to students' learning journey".*

As a way of building a relationship between the tutors and lecturers, Ppt10 recommended that:

*"this could be enforced by the primary lecturer who will schedule VC discussion groups that will be spearheaded by the tutors in order to show students that tutors know what the primary lecturer knows and the two work as a team. This should be done in the presence of a lecturer. Each tutor [is] to be given a topic to address during the VC because they are capable and able to address academic issues in their capacity".*

In support of this recommendation, Ppt9 indicated that "on a yearly basis lecturers should discuss problem areas with tutors so that tutors are able to tackle these areas in class as part of the plan for the year".

The findings on the sub-theme relate to the full involvement of module lecturers to build relationship and support tutors. The findings suggest that academics do not have an understanding of the tutor support and that their attitude towards this programme is a challenge that needs to be investigated.

#### 6.2.5.2 Contracting of tutors

The findings about contracting the tutors reveal that the participants indicated that, when tutors are appointed at Unisa, executive managers sign the tutor contracts. This process, according to them, is not necessary because it is time consuming; it delays the

appointment process which delays the commencement of tutorials for some modules. Their sentiments about this issue are stated by *"limiting the number of the stakeholders involved in the appointment of tutors. If a single office deals with this, it would be easy and quick to appoint [them]"* (Ppt2). In support of this, Ppt6 advised:

> *"Break the ranking and bureaucracy that exists in the system and delays, e.g., contracting of the tutors. These ranks do not address quality management at all instead it ticks the box we think it addresses quality. If these ranks are removed, we will have to come up with quality management systems that would address corruption. It has nothing to do with the core business".*

This means that Unisa should revisit the ITM with regard to the process of appointing tutors whilst not compromising quality that should be addressed by a different approach, not in a bureaucratic form. Ppt2 recommended that *"advertisements for tutors for recruitment should go out in June in order to meet the deadline just before examination period; the earlier the better".*

#### 6.2.5.3 Collaboration and partnership

Working together is powerful, increases knowledge and solves many challenges. The participants thought that Unisa's collaborative and partnership initiatives should be enhanced for digital literacy purposes. Ppt14 indicated:

> *"Team Geeks which collaborated with all Unisa campuses around Gauteng to provide computer skills to children so that a good computer skills foundation should be built. These are good efforts aiming at empowering learners from basic education. Unisa should collaborate with such companies in order to provide computer training to its students wherever they are".*

Ppt15 support this initiative and stated that:

> *"training of the facilitator in the telecentres is done through ICT and regions on how to navigate MyUnisa and how to get into the online platform for students to access their online modules for learning".*

These findings reveal that collaboration and partnerships could solve the digital literacy gaps identified in the ITM if they are well coordinated and managed.

#### 6.2.5.4 Human Resource space, processes and procedures

This sub-theme views HR as the backbone of every organisation. Ppt1 stated: *"I will evaluate the HR space, processes and procedures that will assist the model to succeed".* This comment suggests that, if the HR space is effective, the ITM glitches will be minimised specifically regarding HR related activities. Ppt7 submitted that "*there is a need to evaluate HR since there is too much delay in the appointment of tutors on an annual basis"*. According to this finding, evaluating HR can address the gaps that contribute to the late appointment of tutors, as Ppt7 mentioned: *"I feel that HR is failing ITM because it delays the appointment of tutors year in, year out".*

#### 6.2.5.5 ITM systems

This sub-theme focuses on the systems used to ensure that the ITM runs smoothly. Ppt4 expressed a need to evaluate the current systems used for the administration of the ITM. According to Ppt4, the development of these systems should include the full involvement of the ICT department:

> *"We need to evaluate the current systems and ensure that ICT develops a system that will help students change themselves or schedule themselves on the time table … to eliminate personal clashes".*

Ppt16 felt that some of the systems that exist required staff to do their job manually, which is labour-intensive and this needed to change through an evaluation of the systems:

> *"Creating systems that will take away a lot of manual work and work smart, alleviating a lot of mistakes especially in the statistical part. The system should be integrated, creating a time-table with information that already exists in the system. This will eliminate human error and save time" (Ppt16).*

The findings seem to suggest that systems used to administer the ITM are manual and

labour intensive. An automation of systems is needed to eliminate errors committed when the ITM is administered manually.

#### 6.2.5.6 Reward for participation

Students' efforts should be recognised during assessments, particularly during the examinations. The participants suggested the recognition of the efforts that students put into the tutorials by engaging with other students and tutors. Ppt7 gave an example of how ITM motivates students to participate and interact online:

> *"The issue of incentivising students when they interact and participate online was tested in one college whereby the lecturer said 10% of their pass mark will come from online participation. The module did very well in terms of online participation. No one wants to lose a mark. Other lecturers doubted [this] however, ultimately bought into the idea and participation rate increased a lot. All modules in this college are now standing at not less than 70% participation rate".*

Ppt4 asserted that "*this initiative should be properly planned and incorporated into the existing plans that speak to assessment of students".* According to these participants, students will be encouraged to participate because they know that they will be rewarded. *"The assessment plan to incorporate a mark that will increase participation … The incentive on the participation of students will motivate them to engage"* (Ppt2).

#### 6.2.5.7 Enhanced communication

Communication about the tutor support is part of the ITM and should be done to ensure that all stakeholders are informed and updated on the latest developments of the programme. Tutors in particular felt that communication was very bad at Unisa and hence most of them opted for WhatsApp to connect and communicate with students. Ppt9 indicated that "*we use a WhatsApp group to enhance our communication".* Participants also commented on enhancing communication among stakeholders who implemented the ITM, i.e., colleges, regional staff and other support departments. Ppt4 expressed that *"decisions taken by colleges regarding support services in terms of HR*

*offering should be communicated with the regional staff from the beginning and not late for planning purposes".* Ppt3 believes that:

> *"communication is very poor at Unisa Centre for Professional Development (CPD) is like a sponge and just absorb. Out of 1000 applicants, we only appointed 10 people. We don't know where they are. All cracks are always blamed by HR. Other stakeholders do not come together as one towards a common goal. We will always fail because we do not communicate properly".*

Ppt12 emphasised that "communication protocol to be reviewed".

The findings imply that the institution needs to take a closer look at its communication protocol, consult widely and ensure that communication gaps are closed among all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the ITM.

#### 6.2.5.8 Intergratedness of the model

Participants felt that, for students' needs and expectations to be met by the ITM, the university should ensure that the programme is fully integrated because participants are not convinced that it is integrated. According to these participants, there are a number of activities and systems that are only done for the online programme and not for the F2F tutorial support programme. Ppt5 indicated that *"I am not sure about the integrated part of the model because a lot must still change in the ITM. To me, Unisa is still running two parallel tutor support programmes."*

Some participants identified the disparities between the online tutor activities and F2F activities. According to Ppt10 and Ppt14, F2F tutors are only inducted on administrative activities by regions and not on academic activities as with e-tutors. According to these participants, lecturers should do an academic induction together with all tutors, F2F and e-tutors. Ppt12 stated that:

> *"F2F do their own thing with very little or no support from module lecturers whereas e-tutors get all the support, for example, prescribed books, tutor guidelines, monitoring by academics as well as quality assurance for the work done online".*

Ppt15 submitted that:

> *"e-tutors have an online platform that they use to interact with students while F2F tutors do not have such a platform hence they end up creating social media platforms to share content because they also need to have an online platform much as they are F2F".*

Ppt15 indicated that:

> *"I am aware that some colleges have integrated F2F tutors in the online discussion forums however, the majority have not done so. This is unfair for F2F tutors because they will not have a bigger picture of students' problems and help by fixing them in F2F tutorial classes on Saturdays. Some F2F also operate as e-tutors which is a good thing to do by those colleges who are doing it. I believe that the university should start integrating these tutors to perform a F2F and an online function".*

According to Ppt12*, "the institution should increase the scope of F2F tutors to operate online, not only on the traditional F2F platform".* Ppt5 and Ppt6 indicated that the university should not run parallel programmes but should integrate them*.* Ppt5 added: *"For me there are actually three programmes running parallel, i.e., F2F, e-tutor as well as TAs. At least, integrate the tutor support programmes for quality purposes". Furthermore, Ppt5 and Ppt6 stated that the model would be integrated if there was continuity from the classroom to online support.* According to Ppt10, the two models should be integrated, e.g., tutor payments must be the same, there should be tutor induction on content related issues, etc. Ppt10 added:

> *"I work as an e-tutor and as F2F tutor. I see the effort being put in both tutorial programmes by academics. To avoid such differences and tutors resigning from F2F to online, better [to] mix them".*

In conclusion, the findings show that a lot still needs to be done in the ITM, most particularly in improving the quality of interaction between tutors and lecturers to enhance the participation of students into the ITM by providing proper support, and provision of resources to remote and rural sites which is a major cause of students

moving to urban areas in search of support. By so doing, Unisa would be responding to Africanisation of the ITM, improving what needs to be improved and evaluating aspects that needed the attention of the institution. Of significance in these findings was that the model needs to be integrated and areas of improvement should receive attention.

## 6.3 Findings from focus group interviews

Focus group interviews (FGIs) were conducted at the regional service centres, hubs and agencies to obtain as much data as possible regarding the problem. Eight FGIs were conducted throughout the country.

### 6.3.1 Theme 1: Students' needs and expectations

This theme is made up of four sub-themes which address the major theme above, and these are assignments and examination preparations, teaching of the content, provision of face-to-face tutorials, availability of tutors online, feedback from tutors and flexibility of tutorial schedule.

#### 6.3.1.1 Assignments and examination preparations

The findings in this sub-theme indicated that almost all groups shared the same expectation that tutors should help them with assignments and prepare them for their examinations because they wanted to pass. The participants from FG1 and FG8 emphasised that they expected to be assisted with the content of examinations and assignments, *"we expect to get more clarity on the module, assignments and examinations".* On the contrary, a participant in FG4 understood the role of a tutor and the role of a student in the ITM. The participant indicated that *"some of us expect to be guided on the assignments, not necessarily to be given answers".* This suggests that some students know what they need to do to gain from the ITM while other students depended on tutors. Such students may need to be oriented on the role of a DL tutor.

#### 6.3.1.2 Teaching of the content

The participants indicated that they expected to be taught as if they were in the basic education setting as this would help them to understand the content and increase their knowledge about the modules. A participant from FG8 indicated that *"I expect to be taught the content and receive the best".* Their major expectations were that the students needed to attend classes and to be taught because they were desperate to understand the content of challenging modules. Therefore, attending classes offered through the ITM would be of great assistance in this regard. An FG4 participant indicated: *"I expect to be taught because we know that we must do all the work ourselves however, we expect to be taught so that we can gain more knowledge and understanding of the difficult courses like ENN103".* In addition to the above, students understood that they needed to work by themselves. However, another participant in FG4 stated: *"I have to attend classes and, when I come out, I expect to know more than I know when I started with the class. Even when I interact online, the interaction should increase my knowledge and understanding of the course".*

The expectations stated by the FGs reveal that students came to ITM with a basic expectation that they would attend classes and receive teaching of the modules. According to them, if they attended classes and were taught, their understanding of the content would move to a higher level and they would become better students.

#### 6.3.1.3 Provision of face-to-face tutorials

In this sub-theme, participants expressed the need for face-to-face tutorials in remote and rural areas. A participant in FG4 indicated: *"We need enough face-to-face tutorials especially in remote areas to get an understanding of the module".* Another participant in FG4 stated: *"Increase face-to-face tutorials in rural areas".* A participant in FG4 and FG6 stated that *"all modules [must] be provided with face-to-face tutors".* A participant in FG8 indicated*: "I don't have any expectations from Unisa but I know that I have do to most of the work by myself and not to rely on a tutor even though I attend face-to-face tutorials which are very helpful to me".*

The findings in this theme show that the limited face-to-face tutorial support in rural and remote areas surfaced as a weakness in the ITM provision. Other findings show that some of the participants understood the type of institution they attended.

#### 6.3.1.4 Availability of tutors online

Students said that tutors were not always available online to assist them when they needed help. They blamed tutors when they did not succeed. Most participants in FG8 supported one who stated: *"We need tutors to be there for us to help us with assignments. Instead, they tell us that they are only available at certain times. Some of us fail because they were never there to respond to our queries".* One participant in FG**5** expressed that *"we need tutors to be available always online. We need the confirmation from the tutor even though the students assist one another online. I will not take the student's gospel if the tutor does not confirm the answer".*

The comments from the FGs show that tutors were not always available online to support students. These findings stressed the need for tutors to acknowledge their question posted online and confirm if what was posted was correct.

#### 6.3.1.5 Feedback from tutors

Tutors' delayed feedback and lack of responses to students' queries was raised as a concern by participants in most of the FGs. The findings from this sub-theme indicate that students need timeous responses and feedback. A participant in FG5 said that *"I need the tutor to provide feedback after I have posted online. The tutor takes too long to respond to our questions online".* The same sentiments were shared by another participant in FG8 who indicated that "*it takes days and weeks for tutors to respond to queries and this discourages us to engage online".* What was alarming from this finding was that a participant from FG5 noted with disappointment that *"questions we posted in January are still online and never responded to by some tutors. We end up assisting one another and rely on YouTube to assist us in our assignments".* Some of them even blamed the tutors' delayed feedback for their failure. A participant in FG8 indicated:

*"Some of us fail because they were never there to respond to our queries".* A participant from FG4 recommended that *"all tutors should acknowledge that they have received the question and indicate when they will respond, to show that they have seen the question on the discussion forum".* Prompt responses will build confidence in students asking questions and also improve the quality of communication in the 48 hour turnaround time for queries. However, this was different for tutors operating face-to-face as a FG7-based participant indicated that *"face-to-face tutors provide guidance during face-to-face tutorials when students attend classes".* Another participant from FG8 stated that *"the tutor provides guidance during face-to-face tutorials. When students attend classes, this mode has few problems".*

The findings above reveal that students appreciated face-to-face tutors and how they assist them to solve their learning problems, unlike the online tutors who took time to provide feedback. This needs the attention of the university because an unresponsive tutor may discourage students from participating online. The finding that some of students blamed tutors for their failure suggests that Unisa needs to review the response rate of online tutors since it is easy for students to blame the system instead of taking responsibility for their own work.

#### 6.3.1.6 Flexibility of the schedule

FG4 submitted that flexibility should be examined to accommodate the different profiles of the students. A participant in FG4 indicated:

> *"There should be some level of flexibility that students needs be met that allocating time and modules for those who are working and those who are not working. At least, if we have two different slots to address the needs of different students' availability".*

This finding suggests that, in order for this programme to balance the level of support to students, flexibility of time allocation should be considered. Scheduling tutorials for part time and full-time students" should be considered as this will enable the ITM to address the needs for most students.

### 6.3.2 Theme 2: Quality of the ITM

#### 6.3.2.1 Quality of tutors

The findings about the quality of tutors in the ITM were positive in most FGs. Participants stated that tutors were very helpful and their involvement assisted them to improve their marks. A participant from FG4 indicated:

> *"In my case, the quality of tutors is good for English academic module. It is very helpful and good and I am lacking in English. My marks are improving and I am happy ever since I started attending the face-to-face class".*

Another participant from FG1 also confirmed the quality of tutor and stated that:

> *"my experience is positive especially in accounting. I came to Unisa not knowing this subject but the tutor that was allocated to me helped me to understand accounting and I passed it very well hence I say some provide quality tutoring".*

Only one FG did not have a good experience and indicated that tutors who did not have a teaching background could not facilitate learning. According to a participant in FG7, *"Employ tutors who have experience in teaching and learning because those who have never taught cannot deliver the content to students."*

From these findings it is clear that Distance Education (DE) learners appreciated the support provided through the ITM because their engagement with quality tutors enabled them to understand the content of the modules. The findings also suggest that a requirement of teaching experience should be added when tutors are employed to facilitate learning at Unisa.

#### 6.3.2.2 Quality of tutorials

The participants shared good and bad experiences, revealing the quality of tutorials received from tutors. Some FGs had good experiences of tutorials, however, there were limitations caused by a shortage of resources. A participant in FG3 was of the view that *"content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is the limited*

*resources".* This was revealed in the posts and materials tutors shared with students. A FG8-based participant indicated:

> *"The online tutors should ensure that they post quality content to assist students. Some tutors post old information. For instance, a tutor posted content that he posted last year in exact wording nothing changed and this made me to doubt her and I ended up not interacting because I lost faith in her".*

The findings in this sub-theme suggest that attention needs to be focused on the content posted online by tutors and comments from students need to be read. Poor material posted online could cause the students to lose interest and drop out of the ITM because they lose confidence in the tutor. Quality content should be monitored by lecturers at all times.

#### 6.3.2.3 Quality of resources

The findings regarding the quality of resources pointed to the fact that the ITM lacked resources such as a weak or unavailable internet connection in the regional service centres. Regarding the quality of Internet connection, a participant in FG3 stated: *"Video conferencing tutorials are not of good quality as they are affected by network. Where there are not physical tutorials, VC is connected from another centre however, the network will fail you*". Weak internet connections disrupt classes offered via video conferencing and disadvantage students in the regions. Another participant from FG2 indicated that Unisa does not keep its promise when it allocates insufficient resources that do not accommodate the population in specific regions: *"What Unisa promises to students, it does not deliver because of the resources they allocate when it comes to computers, three computers for self-help and ten computers in the computer labs".* A participant in FG4 emphasised that Unisa did not distribute resources fairly: *"There is a major gap when it comes to quality, because of the inequality on the distribution of resources between the regional service centres of Unisa".*

The participants' views above relate to the fair and equal treatment for all regional service centres. The fact that Unisa promised and did not deliver compromised the

reputation of the Institution.

#### 6.3.2.4 Quality of communication

The findings show that there are communication challenges at Unisa. A participant in FG3 stated:

> *"Quality of communication leaves a lot to be desired because the centre advertises for modules that will be offered however, you find that they are not offered until the semester is finished. No regional staff communicates why the modules were not offered. What is promised to students is not received. False expectations are created by Unisa".*

This view is directed to regional staff's lack of communication to students. Students are the major stakeholders at Unisa and should be treated with care by ensuring that they receive communications. A participant from FG7 condemned poor communication from tutors to students that resulted in students finding other means of communication and seeking help from other students:

> *"The quality of communication leaves a lot to be desired online. Tutors delay to provide feedback to students online. Instead students sometimes prefer to engage with other students on WhatsApp groups because they know that they will receive assistance promptly especially if there is an assignment that needs to be submitted. WhatsApp helps us to interact as students".*

Finally, a participant in FG6 was of the view that *"communication should be enhanced; that is quality for me"*. Key issues came to the surface regarding the quality of communication, which include the creation of false expectations, provision of feedback to students online and enhancement of communication.

To conclude this theme, views from the participants highlight practices that contribute to the effective implementation of the ITM. They include quality tutors who ensure that students understand the content. Some limitations were also identified in areas that may blemish the reputation of the Institution.

### 6.3.3 Theme 3: Access to ITM and participation

The theme of access to ITM and participation comprises four sub-themes as presented below.

#### 6.3.3.1 Access to the internet and connectivity

Access to the internet is a prerequisite for student participation. The problem of data prevents students from accessing the internet, hence, one of the participants in FG6 cited the fact that the university should partner with cell phone networks as it did previously: *"Unisa should reconsider to go back to assist students to access MyUnisa using service providers like MTN, Vodacom and Cell C*". Over and above internet access, some students indicated that they lacked computers hence they could not access and participate in the ITM. Even though computers were available in the centre, it was challenging to access them due to long queues in the computer laboratories. A participant in FG2 indicated that "*I don't have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the centre, when I come to do my assignment online I find that the queue is too long and I cannot access the computer".*

An access to MyModules on MyUnisa seems to be a challenge because of the changes that were effected on the interface in the Learning Management System (LMS). In FG8, a participant, supported by majority, stated that:

> *"for me, Simplicity is key. With MyUnisa it is not easy to access instead one has to go from page to page to get to online discussions. The platform is a problem and a challenge for us to engage and interact in a discussion".*

From the findings it is clear that, for students to participate, they need a computer or another type of device and connectivity. Participants also commented that changes associated with the Unisa LMS delayed them. This finding suggests that the LMS navigation needs to be simplified.

#### 6.3.3.2 Basic computer skills training

The findings in this sub-theme indicate that computer skills are necessary for DL students. A participant in FG3 indicated that the training provided by Unisa helped them because they were able to function online after attending, *"MyUnisa digital literacies workshops/trainings are very helpful".* However, a FG1-based participant expressed that some of the Microsoft programmes were difficult for him/her, hence, they needed more training: *"MyITPlan is difficult. Thorough and continuous training will be appreciated by students. We actually need classes that will clarify us on how to approach this MyITPlan".* My Information and Technology Plan (MyITPlan) is an online support programme that assists students who study Computer Science to sharpen their computer skills in terms of the Microsoft office package.

The views from participants indicated that students do not have the technology skills hence, their non-participation. This is evident from a participant in FG4, who stated: *"We do not participate not because we do not want to but we do not know how to do that because we have limited knowledge of technology".*

The findings reveal that students welcomed the computer training provided to them as it prepares them for online activities of the ITM.

#### 6.3.3.3 Interaction

The participants in various FGs shared their varying experiences on the issue of interaction. A FG1-based participant stated that *"the discussion forum is fine and I am able to contribute as expected as I interact with my study material and contribute to the platform and help other students".* Another participant in FG1 pointed out that *"It is simple with face-to-face because I attend classes*". One participant from FG4 acknowledged students' weaknesses and indicated that students do not follow guidelines hence their failure to participate. The participant stated: *"What makes us not to attend online tutorials and interact with tutors, content and other students is that we do not follow the guidelines given on the tutorial letters".* Other students do not participate and interact because they stay far from the centre and in such areas there is

no assistance*. "Students move from rural areas in order to get access to Unisa resources, computers, tutors online and interact as expected. We do not get help if we stay in such areas"* (participant in FG1).

A FG3-based participant stated that *"if you do not have a laptop it is a challenge to be fully committed, I cannot share what I studied with other students online but can do it face-to-face".*

The findings suggest that interaction forms the basis of learning because students should interact at all levels, i.e. with their study material, tutors, interfaces and other students. This is part of their learning journey which will assist in their development as distance learning students. Students can only interact if they have access to the relevant resources, possess skills that would allow them to interact and tools to access the internet and interact at all levels. The findings also reveal that students take responsibility and acknowledge their weaknesses.

#### 6.3.3.4 Availability of resources

The findings in this sub-theme indicated that students need resources that are in a good condition to be available to enable them to participate online and face-to-face. A FG1-based participant explained that *"Wi-Fi has been improved. When you have a smartphone, you will be able to access internet, participate and interact online"*. A good Wi-Fi connection needs a computer in a good condition. However, according to another participant in FG1, the state of computers is a challenge and they are not well maintained:

> *"The computer labs are not enough and our computers are not well maintained hence they prevent accessibility and we are not able to participate and interact online with fellow students and tutors. It has been six months that some computers are not working".*

A participant in FG5 echoed the fact that computers are not in good condition and this impedes students from participating: "Some of the computers in the labs are not working

and this compromises access because we cannot have resources that are not functioning".

### 6.3.4 Theme 4: Africanisation of the ITM

#### 6.3.4.1 Financial constraints

The financial strength of students can inhibit or promote success in their learning. A participant in FG3 expressed a willingness to participate in the ITM, however, his/her financial situation would not allow this to happen. The participant stated: "*I don't have taxi fees to access the campus and I feel disadvantaged and excluded".* As a result, this participant felt excluded from the support programme, which is a disadvantage for a number of those facing this situation. Other participants from FG3 and FG5 singled out the long distance travelled by students to attend face-to-face tutorials. A FG3-based participant indicated: *"We still travelling between 160-200km, one hour and half to come and attend tutorials every Saturdays".* Also, a participant from FG5 stated: *"Students come as far as Botswana. Why can't the university have a campus to support such students? Unisa must reach out we cannot suffer as we did in our past apartheid period. Students cannot travel 300km to get support".*

The views expressed in these findings relate to the disparities that still exist in communities. Students are determined to use the ITM, however, financial constraints coupled with long distances they need to travel prevent them from using it.

#### 6.3.4.2 Location of centres

These findings reveal students' desire to have regional centres nearer to the places where they reside to access resources. Such proximity would allow them to be involved in the ITM. A FG3-based participant wanted the university to *"ensure that all students access support nearer to their areas where they live in".* Another participant from FG1 was of the view that centres should be brought to students and stated: *"The centres should be located within reach where students can access resources and be involved in the ITM"*. This was captured in FG1 and FG7 as well. For example, a participant from

FG1 indicated: *"Bring the ITM to students and not that students should travel a long distance to access the ITM"* and a participant from FG7 added: *"ITM venues must be free of tsotsis".* Tsotsis are thugs who target anyone and rob them of their belongings.

From these findings, it is evident that the ITM does not work for students staying far from the centres. The fact that the participants were concerned about tsotsis was an indication that there are safety issues in the ITM venues. This suggests that safety issues need to be attended to ease the fears of students.

#### 6.3.4.3 Digital literacies and demanding online modules

Views about a lack of digital knowledge and skills, coupled with demanding online modules, were echoed by participants in different FGs. Participants in FG3 and FG6 were appreciative of the training provided by Unisa to teach students how to use a computer for distance learning purpose. A participant in FG3 indicated that *"Unisa tries by all means to accommodate different types of students who have a poor background, it provides digital literacies for those who attend the trainings; this is a good support for the students".* Another participant in FG6 expressed gratitude and said: *"Attending this training helped me a lot and I was able to be on par with other students since I come from a rural area and have never owned or touched a computer before".* On the other hand, one participant from FG5 explained a challenge faced by elderly students when they tried to do online modules and said: *"While I was busy doing my assignment, there was an elderly student who didn't know how to use a computer. I had to help her to type and submit her assignment*". Yet another participant in FG6 expressed her frustration because she did not possess computer skills:

> *"I feel excluded as a black child. In our high school there were no computers, it was not easy for me with End User Programming (EUP). When you get into the lab at Unisa, I felt so inferior and afraid, and embarrassed to ask because everyone seems to know what they doing".*

For such students, online modules are demanding because they do not have computer skills. A participant in FG1 indicated that *"online modules are strenuous for new*

*students coming from a poor and rural background".* A FG5-based participant also explained how online modules could be demanding specifically on data:

> *"I am expected by the university to connect online for my online modules however, as an African university student, I cannot afford to buy a computer, instead I depend on the university computer lab to connect".*

From the findings above, is evident that Unisa is trying to provide digital literacy skills to students. However, this provision should be intensified particularly for older students who are classified as BBTs (Born-Before-Technologys). Students from rural areas are confronted with the same challenge and need to be trained in this area too. This could be achieved if resources, such as computers and access to data, were provided.

#### 6.3.4.4 Language of teaching and learning in the ITM

Students felt that the language of teaching and learning should be relaxed and accommodate them as they felt comfortable and understood the content better if it was presented in their language. A FG2-based participant expressed her concern thus: *"I am majoring in Tshitsonga. The instructions are English and I must translate to Tshitsonga for me to answer the questions in English online and face-to-face".* The participants felt that English was given higher status than their indigenous languages. A participant in FG6 stated that *"English is always prioritised when communicating with students".*

From these findings, it is clear that students appreciated support provided through the ITM. At the same time, the findings reveal the weaknesses in the ITM support that the implementers need to deal with, such as the language of facilitating learning.

All Unisa students have a right to be included in the ITM and be supported accordingly. The participants shared different views about this issue, for instance, a FG3-based participant indicated that:

> *"Unisa in Pretoria is a lion but the Unisa in Mthatha is a cat. This means that there are no equal standards placed to manage Unisa campuses and this excludes students in rural areas like Mthatha, Lusikisiki and Mahikeng".*

On the contrary, a participant in FG8 was of the view that ITM is suitable for supporting an African student. This participant acknowledged that the model does have challenges: *"ITM is not hundred percent perfect however there are challenges just like any other model".*

The value of the findings in this sub-theme lies in the fact that there are disparities in terms of resource provision for Unisa regional service centres. The findings call for an equal distribution of resources even in the regional centres that are far from Unisa main campus to respond to students' needs. Participants felt that there should be guiding standards that will include all centres and put them on the same level.

#### 6.3.4.5 Socialisation and Ubuntu

An African culture has the strength of socialisation and togetherness. This aspect could be used in the learning environment to promote collaborative learning. A FG8-based participant indicated that:

> *"when you choose to study at Unisa you actually on your own and you need to find someone of the same module to socialise with and assist each other. That is the reason why I come to the campus and get help from my peers".*

Someone in FG2 alluded to the use of technology to connect with peers:

> *"Shared information through the livestreaming could open up possibilities of students gathering in the same place in the same location or township and watching the live streaming together and discuss [it]".*

Findings in this sub-theme reveal that there is power in coming together as students for learning purposes. These findings suggest that the ITM should consider providing the technology and venues where students could come together and learn as small groups. This kind of gathering will build independence, enforce collaborative learning and enhance interaction.

To conclude this theme, there are still disparities within communities due to varying

financial backgrounds that promote or inhibit students' success. As a result, findings show that Unisa needs to look at the location of the support venues to assist students. Safety was key to participants as some of the venues are located in high-risk areas. Participants felt that there was no equal distribution of learning resources in urban and rural areas. This was coupled with issues of inclusion in the programme because the absence of resources meant that they were excluded and not treated fairly. The findings showed that students were positive about the digital support they received in terms of training from the centres and would welcome its enhancement for majority of students.

### 6.3.5 Theme 5: Improvement of the ITM

Eight sub-themes were identified in this theme. These are to increase face-to-face tutorials and merge them with available technological resources; expand telecentres, appointment of Unisa alumni for tutorship; promote peer collaborative learning; experienced tutors' performance; turn-around time for feedback; discussion forum; and communication strategy.

#### 6.3.5.1 Increase face-to-face tutorials and merge them with available technological resources

Participants felt that it is important for Unisa to increase face-to-face tutorials especially for the modules that are challenging to students. A participant in FG1 submitted: *"Increase face-to-face tutorials to meet the needs of students, especially for first year, since when you have them the content is easily understood".* Two more participants in FG1 and FG2 emphasised the use of technology to support students face-to-face: *"Increase the number of VCs to support students"* (participant in FG1) and "*Record videos and share with students to get more knowledge of the module"* (participant in FG2). Yet another participant in FG3 advised that *"there should be a block of tutorials five times, three to four hours, in order to cover for those who travel long distance to get all the support".*

The findings from participants reveal that there is a need for face-to-face tutorial support for some students while others are comfortable with online support. The findings call for

block tutorial classes that would prevent high transport costs to the venue. This suggests that student should be connected across the country for support. Flexibility of support is welcomed by students through the use of technologies available.

#### 6.3.5.2 Expand telecentres

Telecentres should be an extension of Unisa regional service centres and should be used to expand the support to students who stay far from the centres. The participants indicated that access could be expanded through the telecentres. This would assist those students who stay far from the centres to access the services provided at these centres. This is reflected in the comments made by a participant from FG6:

> *"Expand telecentres to provide access to students since Unisa is the university of the Land. Telecentres are being rented by the university and owned by the private people however they are not connected to Wi-Fi, computers have issues and the owners said 'I don't know how to help you, call your university'. Also place Unisa staff members who know exactly how to assist students when they go to these telecentres".*

Another participant from FG3 indicated that "the telecentres should be evaluated to see if it meets the needs of students".

The findings indicate that students are willing to utilise telecentres, however, Unisa needs to ensure that these centres are in good condition and are fully resourced. These resources include connectivity, functional computers and administrators who know how to support students. This suggests that Unisa should revisit its partnership with these centres to respond to students' needs.

#### 6.3.5.3 Appointment of Unisa alumni for tutorship

The participants indicated that Unisa should consider employing its alumni as tutors because they understand the culture of the Institution. According to them, Unisa alumni will be able to empathise with students. These findings are reflected in a participant who represented the views of FG3:

*"Consider employing tutors who are Unisa alumni first because they understand the learning system and will be able to support students appropriately. Those who were educated at campus-based universities like University of Johannesburg and Pretoria do not have the necessarily experience that will understand students and have the techniques of supporting these students from experience."*

A FG7-based participant commented: "*Prioritise employing Unisa alumni*".

This finding points out that the Institution should consider using Unisa graduates because they understand the journey of a Unisa student and would be in a position to support the new students.

#### 6.3.5.4 Promote peer collaborative learning

Learning together as peers was identified to assist the ITM to develop. FGs expressed the need for peer learning support. One participant in FG8 advised that the ITM should consider peer learning to increase support among students: *"Peer to peer learning should be done because students learn better with peers".* A FG5-based participant indicated that such peers should also be utilised in the computer laboratories to assist students with computer skills:

*"Volunteers to work in the labs for assisting in the computer labs other than the DLAs. These students will be empowered and skilled and be given experience in the workplace. This will help with Africanicity because, as the students assist other students in the labs and tutorials, they can use their own languages and get explanation in their own languages and dialect understanding will be built".*

These findings suggest that peer learning should be formalised by Unisa and not happen only online as it is happening currently. Formalised face-to-face peer collaborative learning should also be considered by the Institution, not only for tutorial support, but also for digital literacy support. This will enhance Ubuntu because students will be in a position to assist their fellow students. The advantage is that they will also use their own indigenous languages to ensure that there is understanding along the process of learning.

#### 6.3.5.5 Experienced tutors' performance

Performance is key in every institution and is linked to students' performance. The participants submitted that it was important that *"Old tutors should not be employed because they lose their effectiveness".* FGs had varying opinions regarding this issue. A FG1-based participant indicated: *"Old tutors are committed more than younger ones whose lives are too busy".*

The findings on this aspect reveal that it is important to evaluate tutors from time to time as this will assist the ITM to monitor and reflect on tutors' performance.

#### 6.3.5.6 Turn-around time for feedback

Feedback from the tutors to students plays a role in the learning process. Students expressed their disappointment because of the delayed assignment feedback from tutors. A participant in FG2 stated:

> *"Assignment feedback should be prompt so that we do not repeat the same problems committed in the first assignments. Writing an examination without my feedback is not proper really because we cannot prepare well for our examinations. This should be evaluated by ITM".*

Another FG2-based participant raised a concern about the delayed feedback from the discussion forum and indicated: *"Discussion forums' turnaround time – if tutors are responding on time because they are delaying the students".* On the other hand, a FG6-based participant needed tutors to be evaluated on time management for feedback to students*: "Tutors should be evaluated because they are expected to manage their time for provision of feedback, not to answer four weeks after the question was asked".*

The findings in this area revolve around turnaround time for feedback to students. It could be concluded from these findings that students are not happy with the response time of tutors. Tutors do not assist in preparing students for their examinations because they respond late to students. This suggests that this is an area that the ITM should be evaluated to ensure that students' ITM needs are met.

#### 6.3.5.7 Discussion forums

Unisa expects students to interact online with their material, peers and tutors. The purpose of these interactions is that students should assist and learn from one another and solve problems. The participants indicated that this activity should be evaluated to see if it reaches the intended goal. A participant in FG5 submitted: *"Evaluate the discussion forums regarding discussions of assignments".* This finding indicates that discussion forums do not provide good support to students hence students call for their evaluation. This suggests that the ITM should focus on assignment related activities performed on these discussion forums.

#### 6.3.5.8 Communication strategy

Communication about tutor support is part of the ITM and should be done in order to ensure that students are informed of every activity in the programme. Students felt that communication was weak at Unisa hence they used WhatsApp to connect and communicate with one another. They therefore called for the evaluation of social media platforms to find out their effectiveness in enhancing communication with students. A FG6-based participant was of the view that using social media platforms to communicate the ITM related issues was more effective and advised that Unisa should evaluate this strategy and see how it could be integrated in the ITM communication protocol: *"The use of different medium of communication such as WhatsApp social media linked to tutorials, SMS, MyLife email and F910".* A FG5-based participant was of the view that tutorials were not well marketed among students hence some of them did not know about them. Participants in this FG expressed that ITM should evaluate the communication strategy used to inform students about this programme, for example, one participant stated: *"Efficiency on the marketing of the tutorial classes. This should not be done only once but they must send it often through the use of SMSs".* A participant in FG4 recommended that *"ITM should explore the use of a chatbox to assist students to get rapid responses. It is frustrating to wait for the whole week for an answer".*

The findings in this theme are about the effective communication of the ITM. The evaluation of various communication strategies would assist to improve this aspect and ensure that students are informed on time and get the service they deserve.

To summarise, findings from this theme reveal that students still require face-to-face support. However, this does not mean that technological support does not have a place for them. The participants emphasised the integration of technology with tutorial support and ensuring that technology is in a good condition to fulfil their needs. Over and above, the telecentres are a good idea, most particularly for those students who reside in rural and remote areas. They need these centres to be resourced to assist them to learn. The findings further reveal that students need Unisa alumni to be prioritised and appointed as tutors since they understand what it means to be a Unisa student. Discussions on turnaround times from tutors and discussion forums indicated that tutors should find ways to improve. The promotion of peer collaborative learning should be reconsidered and reworked to promote Ubuntu and learning together. The performance of tutors should be an area of focus during evaluation. This will inform the ITM about the effectiveness of this group of tutors. Finally, the integrated part of the model should be reviewed to align tutor activities to provide effective and efficient service to students.

## 6.4 Findings from document analysis

The following documents were analysed: minutes of the ITM meetings, e-tutor, face-to-face implementation plans and the ITM reports from different stakeholders. The aim of this analysis was to find out how the Integrated Tutor Model Committee (ITMC) met the needs of students in its planning, during the execution of the plan and reporting. It was also essential to establish if all the ITM stakeholders played their roles in ensuring that students were supported as expected. Three themes were identified during the analysis of the documents.

### 6.4.1 Theme 1: ITMC Planning

Directorate Instructional Support Services (DISS) initiates the planning process by

developing the ITM implementation plan. The plan is distributed to all ITM stakeholders as is used to guide planning for this support programme. All stakeholders are expected to integrate their tutor activities in their strategic plans for implementation and reporting purposes. Without planning, proper execution and delivery will not be possible. Two sub-themes were identified in this theme, i.e., stakeholders' involvement and roles and responsibilities.

#### 6.4.1.1 Stakeholders' involvement

For the ITM to be successfully implemented, all stakeholders need to contribute to its implementation. This is done through planning which happens towards the end of each year. DISS develops an implementation plan for tutorial support and shares it with all the relevant stakeholders. The plan is widely consulted with all stakeholders for inputs prior to its distribution. This plan provides direction about tutorial deliverables for the following year. All ITMC stakeholders are expected to introduce the ITM implementation plan into their departmental operational plans with targets and deadlines for that particular year. According to the ITMC minutes and reports, not all stakeholders plan for the ITM as guided by the DISS implementation plan. Some do plan but the implementation was cited as a challenge during the ITMC meeting because there is no buy in from the academics who are lecturing in particular high-risk modules.

Majority of academic departments do not introduce the ITM plan into their college strategic plan. There is no buy-in from majority of lecturers. This is evident from the reports that are presented in the ITMC meetings. The information from schools based in the colleges was not complete because individual lecturers did not provide information about the tutorial activities.

These findings reveal that planning is crucial in the implementation of the ITM. However, there is no buy-in from the stakeholders. This suggests that Unisa should consult widely with all stakeholders and focus on the challenges that lead to failure to implement.

#### 6.4.1.2 Roles and responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities are clearly indicated in the ITM implementation plan. All the stakeholders are aware about what is expected of them regarding this programme. This sub-theme explored how the existing management ensured that tutorial activities are integrated into the colleges, regions, CPD, ICT and HR plans. The findings from this theme reveal that, even though all stakeholders know what is expected from them, they neglect their responsibilities, citing the fact that they have too much academic work. A support department like HR indicated that they could not deliver some of their tasks because of staff shortages in the department. Some departments refer to systems that are failing them resulting in them not being able to execute what they committed to deliver as per the plan.

### 6.4.2 Theme 2: Monitoring of the ITMC plan

The plans are monitored based on the activities that the stakeholders have committed to implement for the current year. Monitoring is done at various departments. During the monitoring of activities, staff members are involved as this entails tracking the different activities on tutor support. This includes tutor appointments, tutor activations for commencing tutorials to support students, evaluating if tutors are providing quality support to students and their facilitation of learning skills, tutor payments and support provided to tutors to enable them to provide quality support. The sub-theme in this theme is tutor appointment and contracting, monitoring of students' participation and tutor evaluation.

#### 6.4.2.1 Tutor recruitment and contracting

All ITM stakeholders are expected to play a role in ensuring that this activity is executed as planned. The main driver in this activity is Human Resources (HR). According to the ITMC process map, this task begins at the college and regional level and moves to HR that does the advertisement, selection and finally the appointment as directed by colleges. The findings from the ITMC reports reveal that not all role players contribute to this activity as expected. HR does plan and integrate the ITMC plan into its operational

plan. However, the implementation of the plan is delayed by other stakeholders who do not respond on time to the requests made by HR. On the other hand, some deadlines are not met by HR because of staff shortages as already mentioned in Theme 1. Minutes reveal that even though there are a number of signatories for the contracting of tutors, this challenge was addressed by ICT who provided a computer signature for all executives who are expected to sign tutor contracts, to speed up the process.

#### 6.4.2.2 Monitoring of students' participation

Monitoring of students' participation in the ITM is done in the colleges and in the regional service centres. This includes monitoring the participation rate of students online and face-to-face. Online tutoring is monitored by the ASCs, who also monitor the number of students who participate online, while the regional staff monitor the number of students attending classes. The findings reveal that the ITMC developed a tool that assisted colleges to monitor participation and interaction of students online. However, this tool only monitors the quantitative part and there is no tool for qualitative monitoring of participation by students. One college, according to the minutes of the ITMC, developed its own tool to address this gap. Reports and minutes further reveal that participation in both platforms is still a challenge in most colleges. Face-to-face attendance does not increase because there are fly-by-night tutorial centres across the country where students pay a lot of money to get assistance with assignments and exam preparations.

A recommendation was made that a mark should be allocated for this activity to increase online participation. However, there is no indication if this recommendation was approved by the ITMC. The findings also reveal that the ASCs based in the colleges carry out the duties of monitoring participation. There is no indication if lecturers are involved in this activity. Reports tabled only address the quantities and not quality of participation.

These findings suggest that monitoring participation is advised. However, there are weaknesses in this activity because it only addresses numbers and not quality.

According to the findings, there is a need to monitor qualitative participation as well because quantitative reports could be misleading since participation is understood differently by different people. The findings also suggest that there is a gap in terms of lecturers' involvement in this activity of monitoring participation.

#### 6.4.2.3 Tutor evaluation

Tutor evaluation is one of the activities that are performed to monitor the quality of tutorial support. According to the ITM plan, all tutors should be evaluated by the academics and regional staff. The regional staff evaluate the facilitation skills of face-to-face tutors and provide feedback to the colleges. Online tutors are evaluated by the module lecturers who look at the content they facilitate and provide feedback to tuition managers based in the colleges. Both academics in the colleges and regional heads report to the ITMC on the progress made in this activity. The reports are then used for the contract renewal of tutors for the following year. The findings in this sub-theme reveal that there is no standard in the colleges regarding this activity. Not all colleges use the evaluation reports of tutors to renew contracts. Some colleges reported that, although regional staff conduct tutor evaluation, some regions do not share the reports with the colleges and this makes it difficult for colleges to monitor the tutors' performance. The absence of module lecturers on the evaluation of content is a serious challenge in the regions which evaluate facilitation skills only and not the content of the modules. A recommendation was submitted that lecturers evaluate tutors via VC. However, very few lecturers implemented this recommendation.

### 6.4.3 Theme 3: Reporting on the ITMC

ITMC expects all role players to report quarterly, semesterly and annually regarding the implementation of tutor support. The academics report on online tutorial provisioning, while the regions report on face-to-face provision of tutor support. The reports are based on the activities planned in the implementation plans which are aligned to the Institution's strategic document. A collated report is developed by DISS for submission to Senate Teaching and Learning Committee. The sub-themes that were identified

under this theme are the implementation constraints and opportunities for improvements of the ITM.

#### 6.4.3.1 Implementation constraints

The sub-theme of implementation constraints in the ITM focuses on the barriers that were encountered during the implementation of the tutorial support programme by all stakeholders. The constraints are related to tutor recruitment, appointment, tutor evaluation, tutor payments and reporting lines of administrative staff. The aim of this sub-theme was to gain an understanding of the challenges facing the ITM and what could be evaluated given the challenges indicated on the analysis of data. According to the findings, constraints with regard to tutor recruitment lies in the fact that stakeholders are not working together to meet the deadlines as indicated in the ITM implementation plan from DISS. The findings reveal that the constraints regarding contracting processes were addressed. However, the role played by HR is still a challenge due to the shortage of staff members in the department. The appointment of tutors remains a constraint in that the regional ITM reports reveal that they submit a long list of candidates who qualify for tutorship however they do not get responses from colleges or colleges send them a new list of qualified tutors without providing feedback on the list submitted to them. Students' participation emerged as a constraint caused by unregistered tutorial centres that appeared countrywide. The low participation rate of students on Unisa tutor support is a matter of concern to the ITMC, hence, an evaluation of this aspect is needed. The findings on tutor payments indicated that there is a discrepancy between online and face-to-face tutors who are not remunerated equally, yet they all support students. The only difference is that one group provides support virtually while the other group support students face-to-face. Delayed payment of tutors was cited as another constraint that discouraged tutors from continuing with their tutoring duties and some even resigned. Some of the constraints were attributed to the finance systems that were introduced, which created gaps in the process. The findings reveal that reporting lines of some administrative staff (ASCs and HR officers) involved in the implementation of the ITM should be reviewed. This review will assist

with the quality enhancement of the system.

#### 6.4.3.2 Improvement opportunities of the ITM

The last part of document analysis deals with opportunities to improve the ITM. This sub-theme is related to one of the research questions that are dealt with during the discussion of findings. In this chapter, few issues appeared repeatedly in the findings namely, the need to provide resources in regional service centres coupled with the improved location of centres which would reduce the distance travelled by students to the centres to access resources. Stakeholders' relationships need to be enhanced to ensure that the ITM is implemented effectively and efficiently to meet students' needs. Students' participation was also identified as a challenge and stakeholders suggested that an incentive should be allocated to increase participation. Communication with students ran through the chapter as an area of concern therefore communication strategies need to improve. For efficiency and effectiveness of implementing the ITM, the ASCs and HR officers based in the colleges should report directly to the tuition manager.

The findings from individual interviews with regional staff members, academic staff and tutors reveal that ITM is a good support programme and its intentions are good. However, some staff members indicated that there is a lot still to be done to close the gaps that exist in this model. Staff members indicated that students' expectations were not met by the ITM since the mandate was not to teach but to facilitate learning. As a result, students' expectations will never be met by the ITM. However, students' needs were partly met since the ITM provides support for all high-risk modules using face-to-face and online modes. Regarding the quality of the ITM, access and participation, participants felt that all stakeholders need to work together to provide quality support to students who, in turn, will have a positive learning experience at Unisa. The provision of resources for students to access the internet and participate as expected by the Institution responded to issues of Africanisation of the ITM. Participants indicated that tutors need to understand that students from remote and rural areas are not exposed as are students from urban areas and should be treated with empathy and care. Digital literacy gaps were identified by participants. Participants were of the view that

interaction between tutors and lecturers enhances participation of students into the ITM by providing proper support, and that the provision of resources to remote areas should be considered for evaluation. Finally, what was of significance is this area was that participants wanted to see a full integration of the model. The university is still running two tutor support systems in parallel.

The findings on data collected through the focus group interviews with students reveal that students' expectations are not met and their needs are partly met because not all modules are provided with face-to-face tutoring. As a result, they called for face-to-face support for all modules especially for students in rural and remote areas where Unisa centres are under-resourced. Students expected to be taught by tutors and since this is not the mandate of the ITM, their expectations were not met. The findings on access and participation indicated that students were aggrieved by the delayed or lack of responses from online tutors and felt that it did not help to participate if tutors are not responding to their assignment and examination queries. There was a level of conflict in this area because students expected tutors to help them with assignments or even do assignments for them. This discouraged some of them when they learnt that the role of a tutor is different from their expectations. The findings on the quality of ITM focused on the limitations of communication with students that need to improve as it relates to institutional reputation and what the ITM promises should be delivered to students.

According to participants, the Africanisation of the ITM would be achieved only if centres are resourced with relevant infrastructure and equal distribution of resources for students to use the ITM wherever they are. This will prevent them moving to urban areas where most of the resources are concentrated. The findings on the improvement of the ITM included increased face-to-face tutorial support, expansion of telecentres to respond to students' needs, appointment of Unisa alumni who are familiar with DL, the promotion of formalised peer learning among students, tutor performance, resources for regional service centres, turnaround time for feedback to students and communication with students.

Data collected through document analysis show that proper planning of ITM is key to

meeting students' needs. However, if there is no buy-in from relevant stakeholders, the implementation of the plan will not be possible. The implementation of the plan includes the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders which may be ignored or neglected, hence the absence of proper implementation of the ITM plan by some stakeholders. The findings on monitoring of the ITM plan reveal that the activity on tutor recruitment and contracting goes back to the stakeholders delayed feedback. The monitoring of students' participation has some challenges due to the fact that the monitoring is one-sided, addressing numbers only and not the quality of participation online. This is an area that needs to be improved in the ITM. Tutor evaluation also needs to be reviewed since its administration and management is not standardised for all colleges. The evaluation process lacks a voice from academics who can comment on content related matters. The theme on reporting about the ITMC reveals that there are constraints in the implementation of the ITM plans. Some of the constraints include tutor recruitment and contracting, and tutor payment and monitoring of students' participation. Finally, a sub-theme on opportunities for improvements in the ITM identified areas that should be considered to make the ITM a success for purposes of meeting students' needs.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the qualitative findings as narrated and supported with participants' quotations. Qualitative data were collected through individual interviews and FGIs with Unisa staff and students involved in the ITM, as well as from the relevant ITM documents. The findings also include the views of the participants who are actively involved in the implementation of the ITM at Unisa regions, academic departments and professional departments, who were interviewed. Five major themes aligned to the research questions were identified. The sub-themes which emerged from the major themes assisted with the logical presentation and interpretation of the findings. The findings reveal varying experiences and contextualised the participants' views which, in turn, assisted in responding to research questions. The major findings in this analysis included the provision of resources that would provide students with a positive learning experience, enhancing communication with students, responsive online tutors, full

stakeholders' involvement in the ITM and proper implementation of the ITM plan. In Chapter Seven, the presentation of the quantitative findings emanating from the survey data analysis distributed to Unisa students is done.

# CHAPTER SEVEN
# ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF QUANTITATIVE DATA AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

## 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the qualitative findings collected through individual interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of responses to the questionnaire regarding the effectiveness of the Integrated Tutor Model (ITM) at the University of South Africa (Unisa). The questionnaire contained various questions which were divided into three sections. Section A required the biographical information of respondents, sections B-G required the respondents to state whether they “strongly disagree” (coded 1), “disagree” (coded 2), “agree” (coded 3) or “strongly agree” (coded 4). “Agree” or “strongly agree” indicated a correct or desirable answer or positive attitude whereas “disagree” or “strongly disagree” indicated an incorrect or undesirable answer or negative attitude towards the ITM. Section H required the participants to provide their own opinions on the improvement of the ITM. To this end, data analysis and interpretation of findings are presented.

The SPSS version 26 software was used to perform the analysis. The data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics and reliability analysis (Cronbach alpha). The descriptive statistics, in the form of counts and percentages, were performed to describe the demographic counts and percentages for demographic variables and needs and expectations items.

## 7.2 Demographic factors of respondents

The questionnaire requested general demographic information of the participants. The findings are presented in Table 7.1.

**Table 7.1: Demographic information of participants**

| Aspect | Category | No. | % | | Aspect | Category | No. | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | F | 510 | 60.7 | | **Region** | Eastern Cape (EC) | 203 | 21.4 |
| | M | 330 | 39.3 | | | Gauteng (G) | 129 | 13.6 |
| | **Total** | **840** | **100** | | | KwaZulu-Natal (KZ) | 255 | 26.9 |
| **Age** | 19-25 | 470 | 51.4 | | | Midlands (MI) | 82 | 8.6 |
| | 26-30 | 217 | 23.7 | | | North Eastern (NE) | 187 | 19.7 |
| | 31-40 | 163 | 17.8 | | | Western Cape (WC) | 93 | 9.8 |
| | 41-50 | 50 | 5.5 | | | **Total** | **949** | **100** |
| | 50+ | 14 | 1.5 | | **Academic year of study** | 1st | 420 | 64.3 |
| | **Total** | **914** | **100** | | | 2nd | 131 | 20.1 |
| **Race** | African | 879 | 98.4 | | | 3rd | 55 | 8.4 |
| | Coloured | 11 | 1.2 | | | 4th | 47 | 7.2 |
| | Indian | 2 | 0.2 | | | **Total** | **653** | **68.5** |
| | White | 1 | 0.1 | | **College** | CAES | 15 | 2.2 |
| | **Total** | **893** | **100** | | | CAS | 51 | 7.6 |
| **Online experience** | Excellent | 123 | 13.5 | | | CEDU | 157 | 23.4 |
| | Good | 596 | 65.3 | | | CEMS | 106 | 15.8 |
| | Poor | 152 | 16.6 | | | CHS | 116 | 17.3 |
| | Very Poor | 42 | 4.6 | | | CLAW | 195 | 29.0 |
| | Total | 913 | 100 | | | CSET | 32 | 4.8 |
| | | | | | | **Total** | **672** | **100.0** |

The information in Table 7.1 shows that 840 participants responded to this question. Out of this number, 510 participants identified themselves as females (60.7%) and 330 participants identified themselves as males (39.3%). This indicates that females were more participatory than males. The ages of participants were also required, and the findings show that a total of 914 responded to this question. The findings in this area reveal that majority of participants fell between the ages of 19 and 25, which accounts for more than 50% of the total sample, followed by those who fell between the ages of 26 and 30 (23.7%). A minority of participants fell under the ages of 50 and above. This means that majority of students involved in the ITM were within the youth category and their age range was between 19 and 30.

The responses about the race of students who participated in the ITM show that the majority are Africans which reflects as 98.4% in Table 7.1. All other races form part of a minority of students who participated in the ITM. This information suggests that the students who participated in the ITM were predominantly African, followed by coloureds who were represented by only 1.2% and the rest of the races are represented with less than a percentage (Table 7.1). In terms of the regional distribution of students who participated in the ITM, the findings show that majority of students who participated in the research, 255 (26.9%), were based in KwaZulu-Natal Region followed by the Eastern Cape Region with a total of 203 (21.4%), then North Eastern Region with a total of 187 (19.7%). The last highest region is Gauteng with a total of 129 (13.6%). The two regions that had less than 100 students' participating, which accounted for less than 10% each, were Midlands and Western Cape. Gauteng region is the biggest of all the regions however students in this region did not participate as expected in this study.

The information in Table 7.1 shows that 653 participants indicated their academic year of study. Majority of participants, 420 (64.3%), were in their first year of study while 131 (20.3%) were in their second year of their study. Less than 20% of the participants were in third and fourth years of their study. This finding suggests that majority of students who participated in the ITM were in their first year of study and needed this support to help them succeed. This finding could be attributed to the fact that a majority of ITM participants are younger than 30 years and could also suggest that they are available to attend face-to-face tutorials and participate online.

According to the findings, as reflected on Table 7.1, 29% of participants indicated that their qualifications were under College of Law, 23.4% under College of Education, 17.3% under College of Human Sciences, 15.8% under College of Economic and Management Sciences. Of the seven colleges, the findings from three colleges, i.e., College of Science Engineering and Technology, College of Accounting Sciences and College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, had less than 10% of the participants. This could be attributed to the fact that, at the time of data collection, these students were not available or did not have access to internet to connect and respond to

the questionnaire.

The findings show that 13.5 % of students indicated their online learning experience is excellent, 65.3% said their online experience was good while 16.6% indicated that their online experience was poor and 4.6% was very poor. This finding suggests that, as much as majority of participants were positive about their online learning experience, the university had to consider the students who found their learning experience poor.

### 7.3 Students' needs and expectations

The findings reflected in Figure 7.1 below show that the participants agreed in most items. This means that they showed a positive response to the information gathered. The students' need for access to resources was rated at 87.1% which is an indication that students cannot function without proper access to resources for them to succeed.

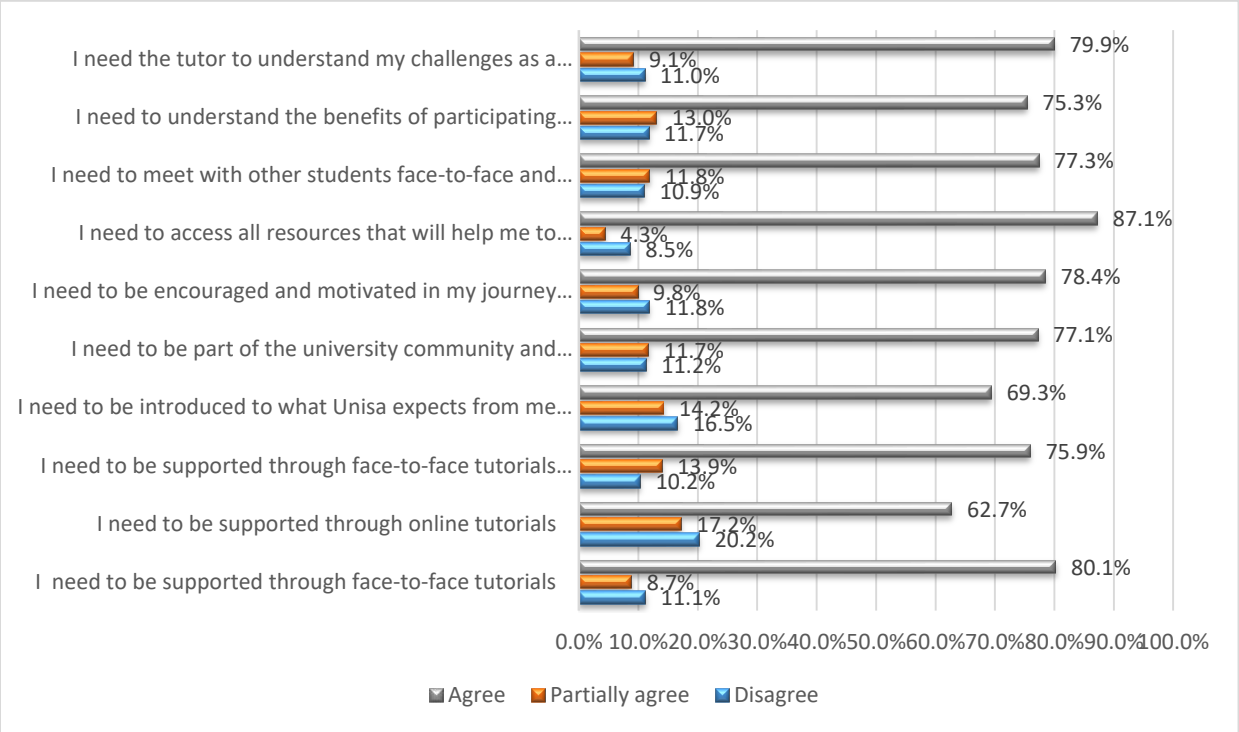


**Figure 7.1: Students' needs in the ITM**

The participants rated the need to be supported through face-to-face (F2F) tutorials at 80.1% who agreed and 11.1% who disagreed. This means that students were in

support of conventional tutoring as opposed to online tutor support. The item about the need for the tutors to understand students' challenges in DL rated 79.9%, while 11% did not agree that they needed this support from the tutor. This percentage suggests that students need tutors to understand the problems that they encounter in their learning journey as DL students. The item about students' needs for motivation and encouragement was rated 78.9%. This could be an indication that tutors need to motivate and encourage students in their tutorial engagement with them. The need to meet with other students F2F and online as well as the item about the need for students to be part of Unisa community and interact with other students was rated at 77.1% and 77.3% respectively. These are high scores and could mean that students are in support of both modes, i.e., F2F and online support. Students were also in favour of interacting and learning from other students. The item about students' need to be supported online and F2F as well as the item about the need to understand the benefits of participating online and F2F were rated 75.9% and 75.3% respectively. These scores suggest that students realised that all forms of support were important for their DL and they needed to use them for their own benefit. There were two items that rated below 70%, students needed to be supported through online tutorials and introduced to what Unisa expects from them as DL learners.

Despite the positive responses which agreed with the needs of the students, it was noted that students indicated that they disagreed with the fact that Unisa supported them with online tutorials only. Students also disagreed that there was a need for them to be introduced to what is expected from them as DL students. This claim suggests that students had knowledge of what was expected from them as DL learners and student orientations were thus not necessary.

The part about what students expected from the ITM comprised eleven items as appear in Figure 7.2 below. One item scored more than 82%, nine items scored 71%-79% and one item scored 61%. The item that scored the highest, 82.6%, was about the politeness of Unisa's administrative staff. This score suggests that students' expectations were not met in this area and that Unisa staff needed to improve their

attitude towards students in the Unisa regions. The expectation of students to be assisted with technical challenges, expectation of tutors preparing before class and students to get guidance whenever needed were scored between 79.8% and 76.7%. These scores suggest that tutors needed to be prepared to give technical support to students who struggled working online due to their lack of computer skills.

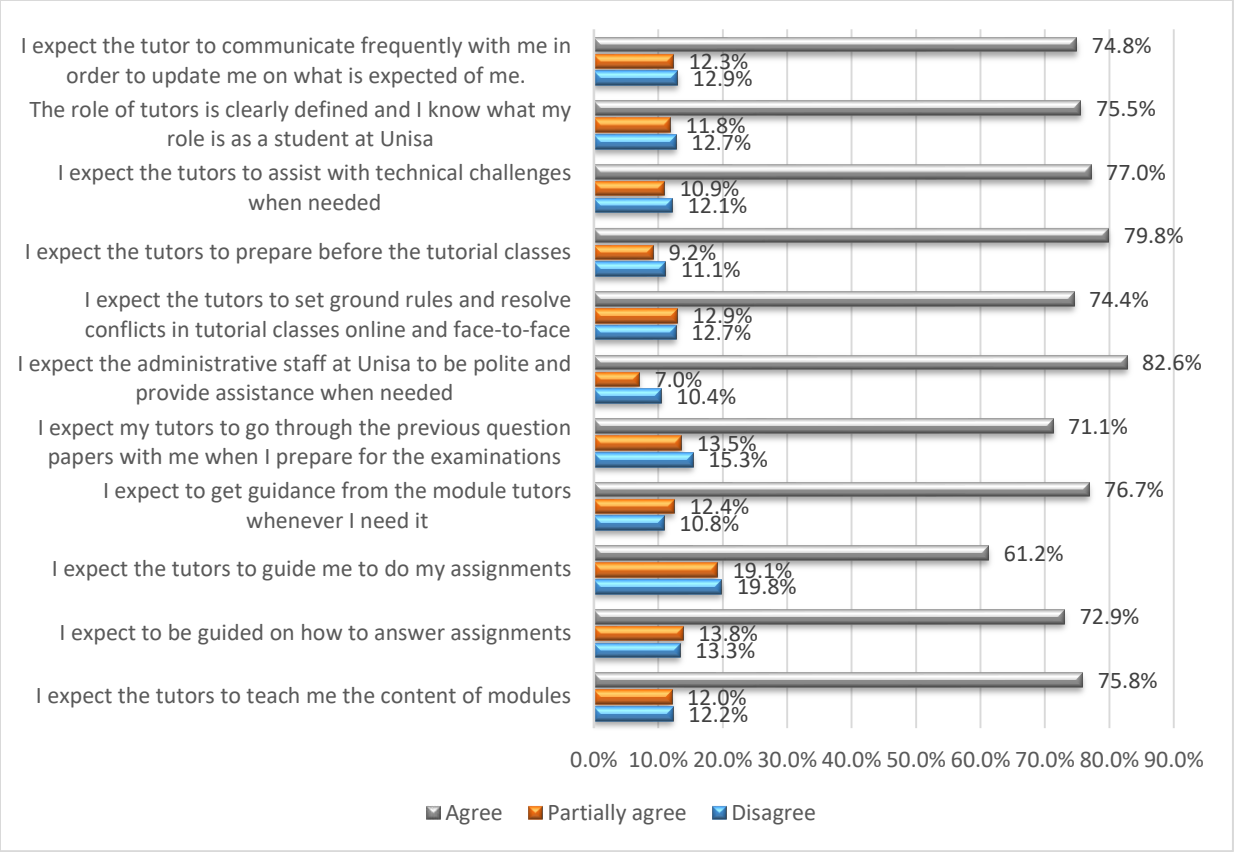


**Figure 7.2: Students' expectations of the ITM**

Two items rated just above 75% and these were items about the students' need to be taught by the tutor (75.8%) and the item on the role of tutor and student was rated at 75.5%. These scores show that students expected teaching and not facilitated learning as required by the ITM. The scores also show that students knew their role and the tutor's role in the DL environment. This, in turn, suggests that there was no need for the university to orientate them about their roles as DL students.

The items that scored between 74.8% and 71.1% included students' expectations of

frequent tutor communication with them (74.8%), conflict resolution and ground rules (74.4%), tutor guidance on assignments (72.9%) and tutor assisting with examination preparations (71.1%). These scores mean that most students were in favour of being assisted with their assignments and that the tutor should always be available to respond to their queries online and resolve conflicts in their tutorials. The fact that students expected assistance with their assignments suggests that students were not prepared to be independent as DL students. Students' expectation of tutors to guide them to do assignments was rated at 61.2%. This was the lowest score allocated by the participants. This score could mean that, even though some students are in favour of being assisted with their assignments, some do not expect such assistance from tutors.

## 7.4 The quality of the ITM

Section D of the questionnaire had 13 items. According to the responses reflected in Figure 7.3, four items were rated between 71.9% and 61.3%, six items were rated between 59.2% and 51.2% and three items were rated between 49.6% and 34.9%. In the items that were rated high, 71.9% of the participants indicated that attending tutorials helped them to understand the content, the tutor knew the content very well (66.5%), tutorial support helped them to be independent in their learning (64.8%) and the quality of the tutorial met their needs and expectations (61.3%). These ratings suggest that students were satisfied with the quality of tutorials and less than 20% improvement was required as reflected in Figure 7.4 below.

In the six items that were rated between 59.2% and 51.2%, the participants agreed that they received quality tutorials. These included quality learning experience through tutorials (59.2%), the provision of tutorial classes as promised (58.3%), communication of changes on the tutorial schedule (55.1%), planning of tutorials (54.7%), tutor's guidance with assignments (51.5%) and response to students' queries (51.2%). However, the rating was not impressive, which means that a lot still needs to be done by the university to improve these areas of the ITM. The last three items received a low rating between 49.6% and 34.9%. These items are the provision of tutors' feedback to

students (49.6%), assistance of regional staff to access their e-tutors (42.9%) and tutors referring students to specialists within the university (34.9%). These ratings suggest that students were not happy with the service received and that the university needs to review and find a better way of serving students in these areas. The findings in this section reveal that there are areas of strength in the quality of the ITM, areas where students are just satisfied and there are areas of weakness. This suggests that the university's intervention is required to address these areas in the ITM. The fact that the tutors were not referring students to specialists suggests that there was a possibility that tutors were not conversant with the specialist unit that exists within the Institution. This is an area of weakness that needs to be addressed.

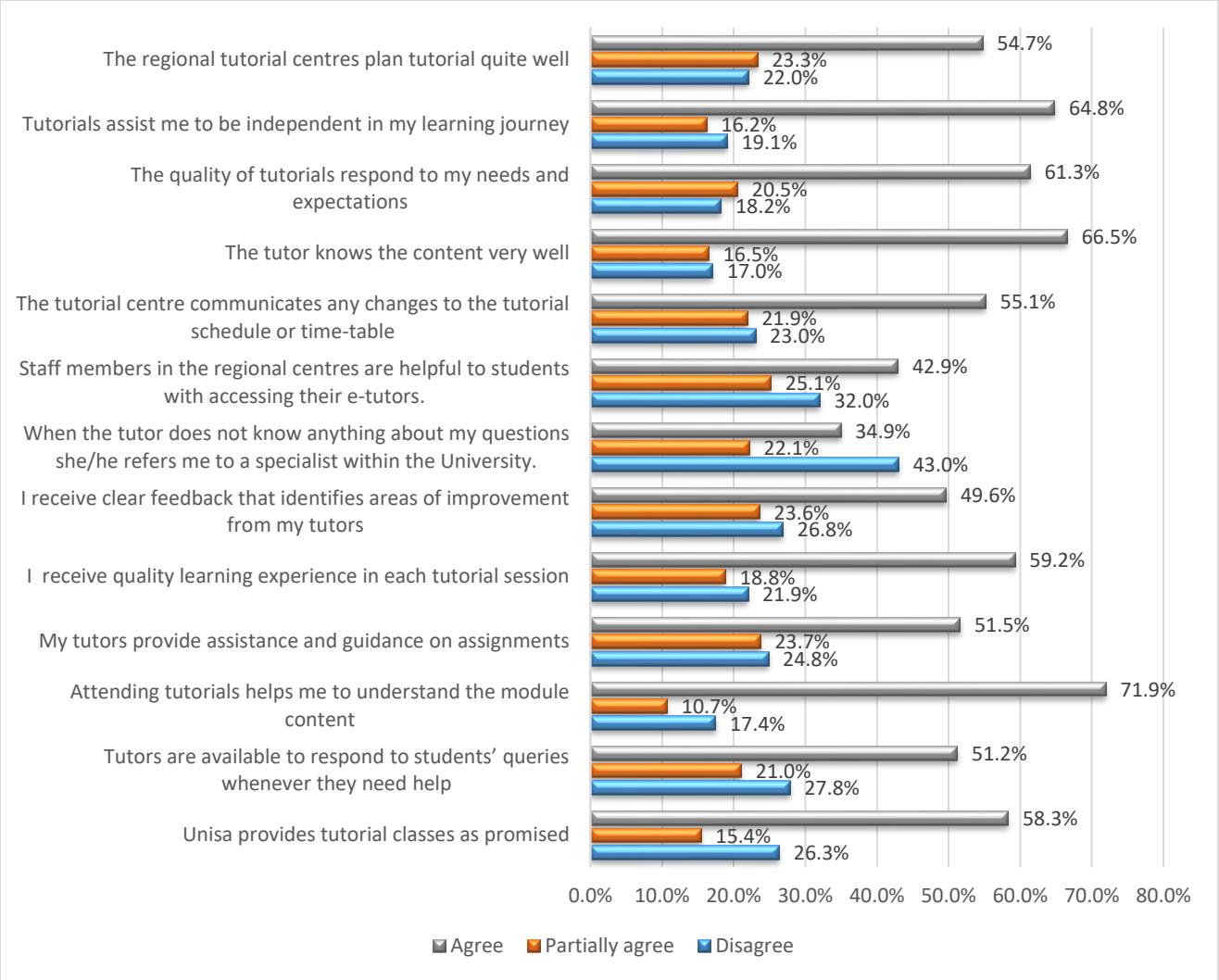


**Figure 7.3: Quality of the ITM**

## 7.5 Access and participation to the ITM

This section on access and participation in the ITM contained 12 items as indicated in Figure 7.4 below. One item had a good response of 61.2%, and four items had a satisfactory response of between 58.0% and 50.1%. The last seven items had low ratings of 47.9% to 28.8%. The item that received a high rating concerned access to the computer laboratory in the regions. This reveals that a majority of students were happy about access to computers in the regional laboratories. In addition, 22.4% were not happy about the access to computer labs and 16.5% partially agreed that they had

access to the computers in the regional laboratories. Four items were moderately rated that included students' exchange of information online (58.0%), tutors leading discussions online (57.2%), availability of internet always (55.0%) and tutorial staff provision of positive learning experience (50.1%). These ratings show that, even though the students were satisfied with the services, gaps were identified for all students to get the best service from the university. The last seven items in this section were rated lower than 50%. They are: access to online support for purposes of interaction with other students (47.9%), tutor's presence online (47.5%), teamwork and assistance to other students (47.3%), participation in face-to-face tutorials only (44.9%), access to online tutors for the purpose of asking questions (42.0%), ITM inclusive and accessible to remote area students (40.3%) and participation only to online tutorials (28.8%). The low ratings in the seven items indicates that the students were not happy with the service that they received in these areas and that measures should be taken to improve the situation for students.

These findings indicate that students were not satisfied with access and participation in the ITM. This is evident from their ratings that, out of 12 items, only five were satisfactorily rated and the rest got low ratings. This indicates that the university needs to attend to these items to respond to the students' needs.

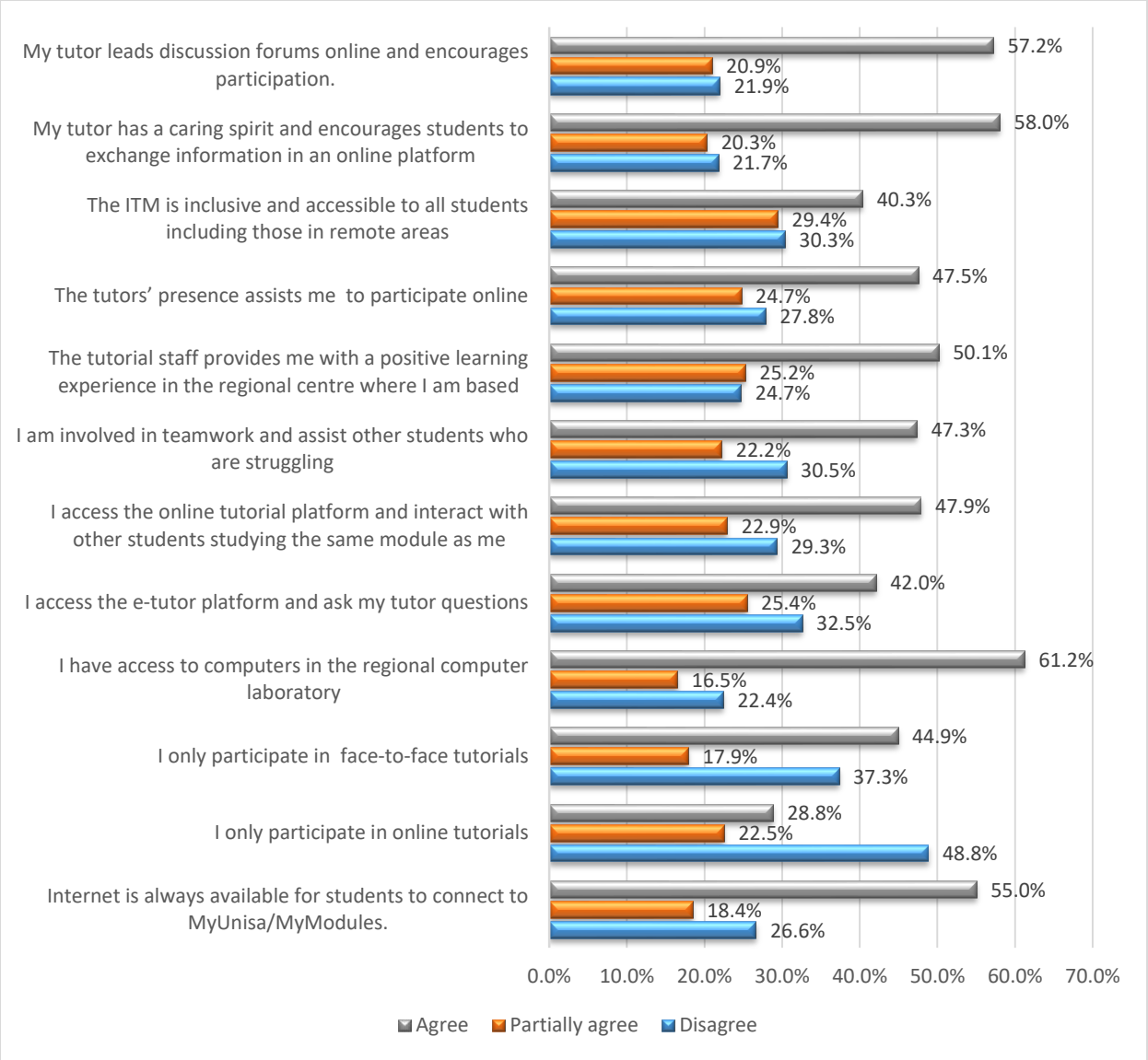


**Figure 7.4: Access and participation to the ITM**

## 7.6 Africanisation of the ITM

Section F dealt with the Africanisation of the ITM and participants needed to respond to the question, How could ITM be Africanised in order to address the needs of African students? (see Figure 7.5 below). Out of the 11 items in this section, only one item had a high rating of 71.7%. In this item, students indicated that their centres are far from their homes and that they required transport to travel to the centres. This indicates that

majority of students needed to have transport fees to reach the centre.

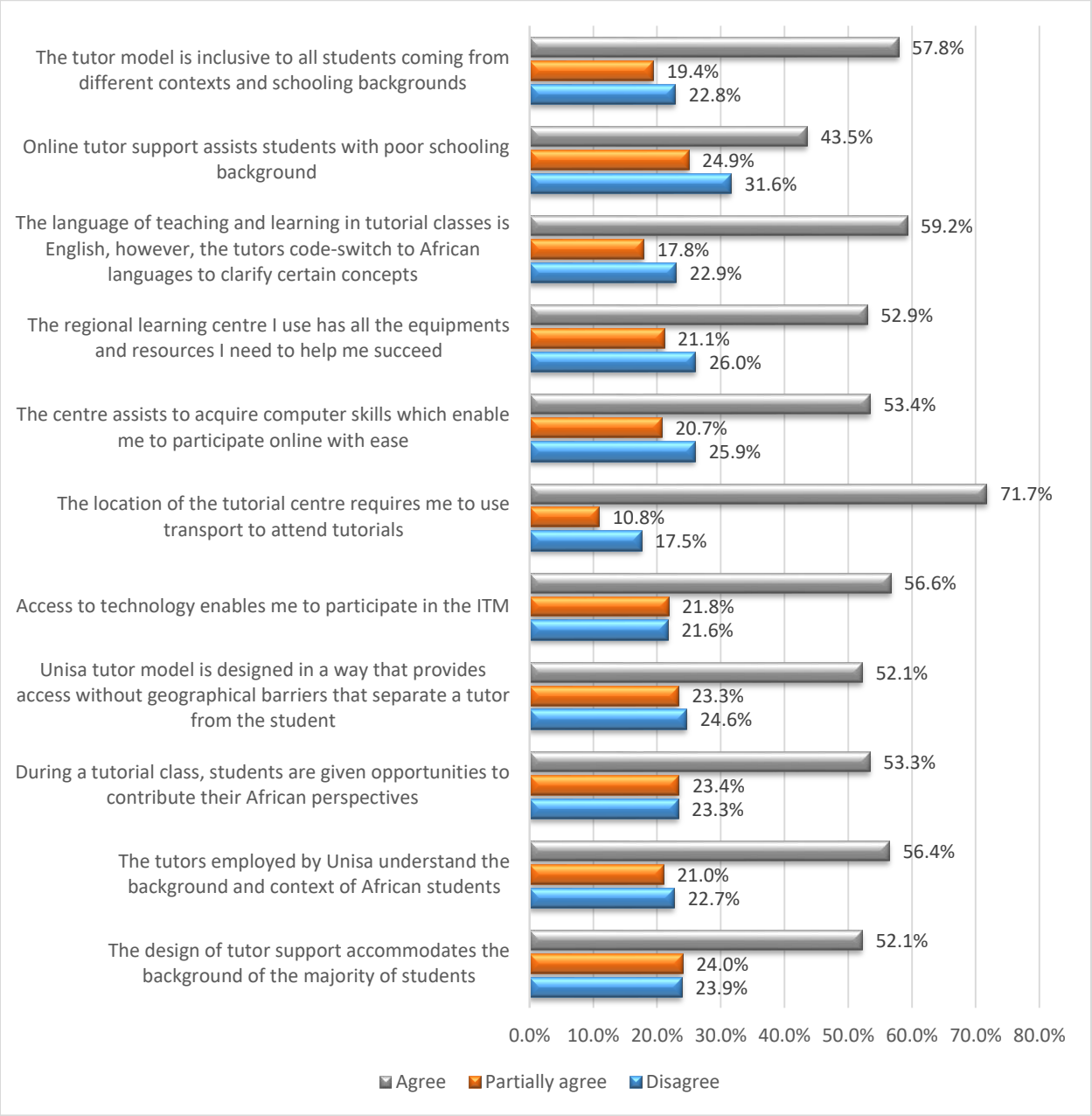


**Figure 7.5: Africanisation of the ITM**

The findings in nine items show that students agreed with the statements and were generally happy. The ratings in this area are between 52.1% and 59.2%. These items include the language of teaching and learning used by the tutors and code switching to clarify concepts to students (59.2%), the ITM's inclusiveness for students with different

contexts and schooling backgrounds (57.8%), access to technology for participation (56.6%), Unisa tutors' understanding of the African students' background and context (56.4%), assistance by centres for students to acquire computer skills (53.4%), opportunity for students to give their African perspectives during a tutorial class (53.3%), availability of equipment and resources by the centres (52.9) and the design of ITM accommodates the background of the majority of students (52.1%), the ITM design provides access without geographical barriers (52.1%). The item that was rated low, i.e 43.5%, indicated that students were not in agreement with the fact that the online tutor support assisted students with poor schooling backgrounds.

The findings in this section indicate that students were generally satisfied with the way the ITM is provided for African students taking into consideration their backgrounds and contexts. The items that students did not agreeing with were the area of location of the centres which meant that students needed to travel to get access to the ITM and this required them to have transport fees, which is not viable for majority of students given their financial backgrounds. This suggests that majority of students felt that online tutor support was not meant for students from poor schooling backgrounds and did not accommodate them.

## 7.7 Aspects related to the improvement of the ITM

The last section of the questionnaire focused on the aspects related to the improvement of the ITM. This section comprised five items (see Figure 7.6 below). The findings show that these five items were rated between 80.6% and 55.7%. The participants agreed that F2F tutorials should be evaluated hence this was rated at 80.6%. This was followed by access to resources, which was rated 79.0%, tutor interaction with students (77.4%), students' discussion forum (69.8%) and online tutors received the lowest rating of (55.7%) as indicated in Figure 7.6 below.

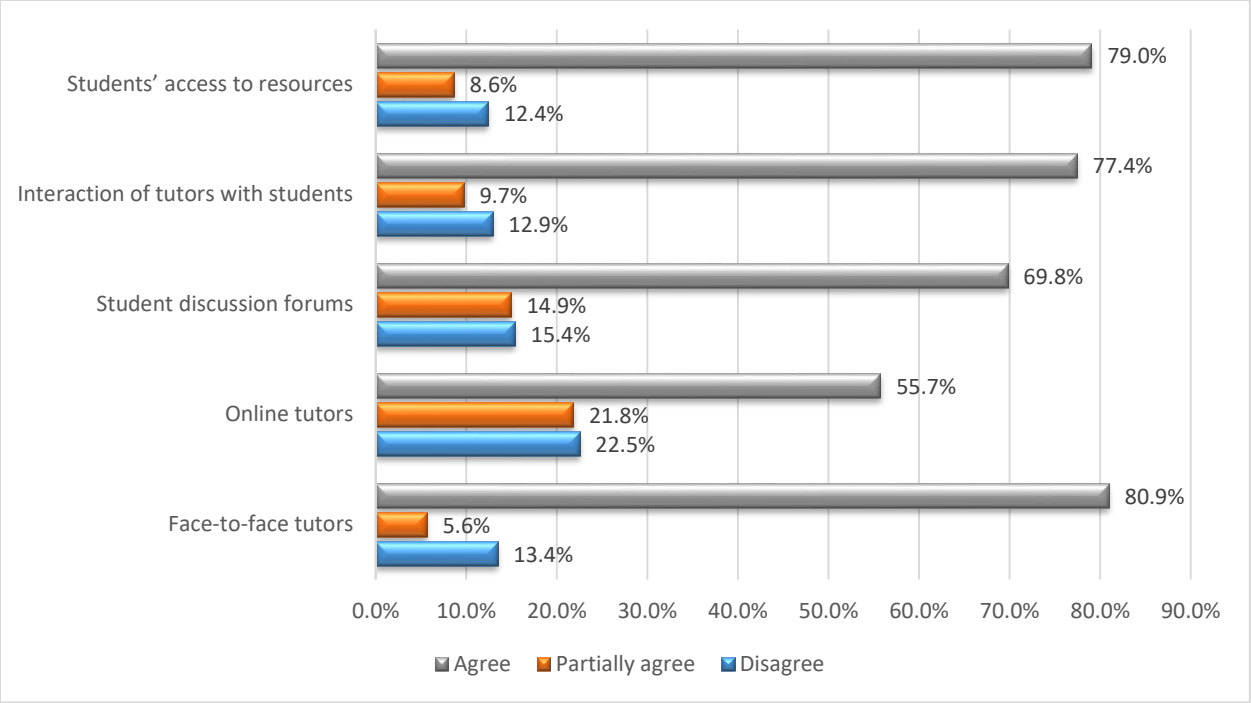


**Figure 7.6: Aspects related to the improvement of the ITM**

In concluding the findings of quantitative analysis, the ratings show that participants are positive and satisfied in some areas and negative and unsatisfied in other areas of the ITM. The section that follows integrates (triangulates) the qualitative and quantitative findings in line with the tradition of mixed methods research to enhance the understanding of the ITM.

## 7.8 Integration of qualitative results and quantitative findings

In mixed methods research, the work of presenting the findings is incomplete until the qualitative and quantitative parts are merged, compared and corroborated. The findings complement each other and enhance the validity and reliability of the study. The similarities and differences of the findings were considered in the context of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the ITM. Below is a comparison and integration of quantitative and qualitative findings as informed by the themes that emanated from the data analysed from the qualitative part of the study.

### 7.8.1 Students' needs and expectation in the ITM

This theme was about the students' needs and expectations of the ITM. The findings from the FGIs and individual interviews showed that students' expectations were not met because they expected to be taught by the tutors as is the case with campus-based universities. The following are examples of narratives from participants in qualitative findings:

> *"I expect to be taught the content and receive the best" (participant from FG8).*

> *"They expect teaching more than support" (Ppt13).*

This dissatisfaction is confirmed by the quantitative findings which reveal that 75.8% of the participants agreed that they expected to be taught the content of the modules as shown in Figure 7.2.

The qualitative findings indicate that students expressed the need for the tutors to be always available online. The narratives from Ppt4, Ppt6 and FG5 confirm this deduction. This finding is corroborated by the quantitative participants' response which was rated 74.8% as reflected in Figure 7.1. This rating indicates that students agreed that the tutors should communicate frequently with them and update them on what is expected from them in the module. The quantitative findings in Figure 7.1 indicate that 80.1% of participants needed to be supported through F2F tutorials. This was in agreement with the qualitative findings, in which participants indicated that there was a need for F2F tutorial support. This is shown in theme 1, sub-theme 6.3.1.3 and FG4 and FG5 which indicated that all modules should be provided with F2F support particularly in remote areas.

### 7.8.2 Quality of the ITM

The findings do not concur regarding the quality of the ITM. The quantitative findings in Figure 7.3 show that participants felt that 59.2% received quality tutoring and 61.3% agreed that the quality of tutorials responded to their needs and expectations. The qualitative findings presented a different picture as they indicated that not every student

received value for money. Ppt1 indicated that not everyone received quality tutoring because lecturers were minimally involved in this activity. FG3 was happy about the quality of tutoring while FG7 was not happy and indicated that the information posted online was old and the lecturer did not quality assure it. The findings from document analysis in 6.4.2.2 and 6.4.2.3 indicate that all stakeholders should work as a team to provide quality tutoring. This suggests that the ITMC was aware of the gap in this area and something should be done to address it. The quantitative findings showed that 66.5% of participants indicated that the tutor knew the content very well, which was an indication that they were positive about the quality of the tutor. These findings correspond with the qualitative findings in sub-theme 6.3.2.1, in which participants in FG1 and FG4 expressed that they were happy about the quality of their tutors, who helped them to understand the content and contributed to their success. The quality of communication was rated at 49.6% by participants who indicated that the feedback received from the tutors did not identify areas of improvement. The findings concurred with the qualitative findings in sub-theme 6.3.2.4. The participants claimed that communication leaves a lot to be desired for both online and F2F tutorial support hence some of them opted for WhatsApp to support each other as illustrated by the following example of narrative extracted from sub-theme 6.2.6.5: "*We use a WhatsApp group to enhance our communication"* (Ppt9).

### 7.8.3 Access and participation in the ITM

The quantitative findings reflected in Table 7.1 reveal that 61.2% had access to the regional computer laboratories. The qualitative findings regarding access to Unisa computer laboratories correspond with the quantitative findings in that participants in FG5 and FG2 in sub-theme 6.3.3.4 agreed that they had access to the regional computers. However, long queues and non-functional computers made it impossible for them to enjoy the benefits of access. Regarding access to connectivity, the quantitative findings show that 55% of participants agreed that internet was always available for students to connect to MyUnisa/MyModules. The qualitative findings corroborated this finding that Wi-Fi was improved in the centres and students could access internet with

their own devices. This was confirmed by FG1 narrative in sub-theme 6.3.3.4. The quantitative findings reveal that 47.9% indicated that students accessed online tutorial platforms and interacted with other students in the same module. The qualitative findings partly agreed with these findings because participants indicated that they did not participate as expected because of computer literacy skills problems and they did not have devices to connect and interact. This was revealed from the findings of individual interviews by Ppt14, sub-theme 6.2.3.3, and FG4 and FG3 in sub-theme 6.3.3.3.

### 7.8.4 Africanisation of the ITM

The quantitative findings, as reflected in Figure 7.5, show that 71.7% were in agreement with the fact that the location of the tutorial centre required participants to use transport to attend tutorials. This finding corresponds with the qualitative finding in sub-themes 6.2.4.3 and 6.3.4.1 where Ppt14 and FG3 indicated that distance travelled by students to the tutorial centre was a financial challenge, which put them at a disadvantage and they thus felt excluded. The quantitative findings also reveal that 52.9% of participants indicated that the regional centres had all the equipment and resources they needed for learning. However, this is different with the qualitative findings, in which participants (Ppt8) in sub-theme 6.2.4.3 indicated that the infrastructure in the centres was a barrier to learning for students from the rural areas. For instance, difficulty in accessing internet and video conferencing classes as well as access to MyUnisa platform had a negative impact on students from rural and remote areas. According to the quantitative findings, only 43.5% indicated that online tutor support assisted students with poor schooling backgrounds. This was the lowest rating in this area and this finding agreed with the qualitative findings, in which Ppt1 and Ppt6 cited the fact that the model did not consider their diverse backgrounds. On the other hand, FG5, FG3 and FG6 in sub-theme 6.3.4.3 suggested that computer skills training should be promoted in the regions to assist them to fit into the ODEL environment.

### 7.8.5 Aspects related to the improvement of the ITM

The quantitative findings show that 80.6% of the participants indicated that F2F tutorials should be evaluated. This finding concurs with the qualitative findings in which participants' narratives reveal that tutor recruitment and appointments should be evaluated. These processes included both online and F2F tutorials. In the quantitative findings, 79% of participants indicated that resources should be evaluated. This finding corresponds with qualitative findings, in which Ppt3, Ppt6, Ppt9 and Ppt12 in sub-theme 6.2.6.5 felt strongly that resources, such as telecentres, old tutors, communication and the ITM systems, should be evaluated to see if they assisted in meeting students' needs. The quantitative findings indicated that 77.4% of student and tutor interactions should be evaluated. These findings concur with the qualitative results in sub-theme 6.2.3.1, in which Ppt6 and Ppt2 cited the challenges of shy students communicating online and those who interact because they are driven by tasks to be completed such as assignments. This finding may be an indication that students need to be made aware of the reason why they need to interact with tutors.

In the quantitative findings, 55.7% of participants felt that online tutors should be evaluated, 21.8% partially agreed to this evaluation and 22.5% disagreed that online tutors should be evaluated. This finding corresponds with the qualitative finding from sub-theme 6.3.1.5 in which the FG8 participants indicated that the online tutors needed to improve their feedback response rates. The last area that participants indicated needed to be evaluated was the discussion forums. The quantitative findings show that 69.8% of the participants agreed with the findings, 14.9% partially agreed and 15.4% disagreed. In comparison with the qualitative findings in this area, FG1 and FG6 participants in sub-theme 6.3.3.3 concur with the quantitative findings as they indicate that tutors should be evaluated on turnaround times on the discussion forums.

## 7.9 Integration of qualitative results and quantitative findings

This section integrates the quantitative results and qualitative findings as informed by the themes that emanated from data analysis.

### 7.9.1 Students' needs and expectations in the ITM

The findings from the FGIs and individual interviews show that students' expectations were not met because they expected to be taught by the tutors on a daily basis as is the case with campus-based universities, for example, *"I expect to be taught the content and receive the best"* (Participant from FG8), and *"They expect teaching more than support"* (Ppt13). This gap in the ITM is corroborated by the quantitative findings which reveal that 75.8% of the students expected to be taught in the modules that they were enrolled in (see Figure 7.3).

Furthermore, the qualitative findings indicate that students needed the tutors to be available online as evidenced by the expressions by Ppt4, Ppt6 and FG5. This finding is confirmed by the quantitative participants' response (74.8% and Figure 7.2). According to the findings, the tutors should communicate frequently with students and update them on what is expected from them in the module. The quantitative findings in Figure 7.2 further indicate that 80.1% of participants needed to be supported through F2F tutorials. This agrees with the qualitative findings that indicate that there is a need for F2F tutorial support. This is further shown in Theme 1, Sub-theme 6.3.1.3 and FGs 4 and 5 which indicate that all modules should be provided with F2F support particularly in remote areas.

### 7.9.2 Quality of the ITM

The findings do not concur regarding the quality of the ITM. The quantitative findings show a 59.2% response that students received quality tutoring and 61.3% response that the quality of tutorials responded to students' needs and expectations. However, the qualitative findings present a different picture in that they indicate that not every student received quality tutorials. Ppt1 indicated that not everyone received quality tutoring because lecturers were minimally involved in the ITM. FG3 was happy about the quality of tutoring while FG7 was not happy and indicated that the information posted online was old and the lecturer did not quality assure it. The findings from document analysis (see 6.4.2.2 and 6.4.2.3) indicate that all stakeholders should work as a team to provide

quality tutoring. This suggests that the ITMC was aware of the gap in this area.

In the quantitative findings, 66.5% of students were positive about the tutor as they indicated that the tutor knew the content very well, confirmed also by the qualitative findings in sub-theme 6.3.2.1 where participants in FG1 and FG4 were happy with their tutors who helped them to understand the content and contributed to their success. The quality of communication was rated at 49.6% by participants who indicated that the feedback received from the tutors did not identify areas of improvement. The findings agree with the qualitative findings in sub-theme 6.3.2.4. The lowly rated communication about online and F2F tutorial support caused some students to opt for WhatsApp-based interaction to support each other: "*We use a WhatsApp group to enhance our communication"* (Ppt9) (see also sub-theme 6.2.6.5).

### 7.9.3 Access and participation in the ITM

The quantitative findings reflected in Table 7.1 reveal that 61.2% had access to the regional computer laboratories that is confirmed by the qualitative findings in that participants in FG5 and FG2 (sub-theme 6.3.3.4) agreed that they had access to the regional computers. However, long queues and non-functioning computers impacted negatively on the access. The quantitative findings show that 55% of participants agreed that internet was always available for students to connect to MyUnisa/MyModules. This finding agreed with the qualitative findings which showed that Wi-Fi was improved in the centres and students could access internet even through their own devices (FG1 in sub-theme 6.3.3.4). While 47.9% of the participants indicated that students accessed online tutorial platform and interacted with other students in the same module. See sub-theme 6.2.3.3 (e.g. Ppt14) and sub-theme 6.3.3.3 (e.g. FGs 4 and 3) that indicated that students did not participate as expected because of computer literacy skills problems and they did not have devices to connect and interact.

### 7.9.4 Africanisation of the ITM

The quantitative findings show that 71.7% agreed that the location of the tutorial centre

required participants to use transport to attend tutorials, corroborated by the qualitative finding in sub-themes 6.2.4.3 and 6.3.4.1 where Ppt14 and FG3 indicated that distance travelled by students to the tutorial centre was a financial challenge, which put them at a disadvantage and they thus felt excluded. This situation mainly affects black students from poor communities. The quantitative findings also reveal that 52.9% of participants indicated that the regional centres had all the equipment and resources they needed for learning. However, the qualitative findings disagreed; see sub-theme 6.2.4.3 (e.g. Ppt8) that indicated that a lack of infrastructure in the centres was a barrier to learning for students from the rural areas, the majority of whom are black Africans. For instance, difficulty in accessing internet and video conferencing classes as well as access to MyUnisa platform had a negative impact on students from rural and remote areas.

According to the quantitative findings, only 43.5% indicated that online tutor support assisted students with poor educational backgrounds. This was the lowest rating in this area, confirmed by the qualitative findings in which Ppt1 and Ppt6 cited the fact that the ITM did not consider their backgrounds as it treated everyone in the same way. On the other hand, sub-theme 6.3.4.3 (FGs 3, 5 and 6) suggested that computer skills training should be promoted in the regions to assist students to fit in the ODEL environment.

### 7.8.5 Aspects related to the improvement of the ITM

The quantitative findings show that 80.6% of the participants indicated that F2F tutorials should be evaluated, which is supported by the qualitative findings which reveal that both the online and F2F tutor recruitment and appointments should be evaluated. Also, the quantitative findings (79%) indicated that resources should be evaluated. In the qualitative findings (sub-theme 6.2.6.5, e.g. Ppts 3, 6, 9 and 12) enumerated resources such as telecentres, old tutors, communication and the ITM systems should be evaluated to see if they assisted in meeting students' needs.

The quantitative findings indicated that 77.4% of student and tutor interactions should be evaluated. These findings concur with the qualitative results in sub-theme 6.2.3.1, in which Ppts 6 and 2 cited the challenges of shy students communicating online and

those who interacted because they were driven by tasks to be completed, such as assignments.

Furthermore, 55.7% of participants felt that online tutors should be evaluated, whereas 21.8% partially agreed and 22.5% disagreed. This finding corresponds with the qualitative finding from sub-theme 6.3.1.5 in which the FG8 participants indicated that the online tutors needed to improve their response rates since they took time to provide feedback to students. The last area that needed to be evaluated is the discussion forums, confirmed by 69.8% of the participants who agreed, though 14.9% partially agreed and 15.4% disagreed. The qualitative findings, sub-theme 6.3.3.3 (FGs 1 and 6), concur as they indicated that tutors should be evaluated on turnaround times on the discussion forums.

## 7.10 Discussion of findings

The purpose of this section is to discuss the findings considering the demographic data of the participants, the five themes that emerged during data analysis and related categories. The findings communicate a variation of the participants' experiences in the Integrated Tutor Model (ITM). Qualitative and quantitative data will be integrated in the discussion.

A major finding in this study is that the ITM does not meet the students' expectations and only partly meets their needs. The university has not yet fulfilled its promise fully to support the students through F2F and online. There is therefore a disjuncture between the students' expectations to be taught and the tutors facilitating the tutorial sessions. This indicates that clarity was not given to the students about the role or duties of the tutors. According to Tait (2000:289), Comas-Quinn et al. (2012:141) and Seletso (2010:7), tutors perform a number of roles, including cognitive or pedagogical roles, which, in this case, provide the facilitation of learning. There is a need, therefore, to clarify this to the students. Since the demographical information of the students shows that they are young, this suggests that they had just graduated from secondary schools where they were taught. Hence, their transition from the school education to the

university education needs to be explained to them. The theory of constructivism should be taken advantage of at their level where the students should facilitate their learning as they independently construct knowledge. According to McCullough and Munro (2018:72), students should be engaged and not just expect the tutor to teach them.

The students appreciate that they are supported in the high-risk modules through F2F, except the more high-risk modules in which they only receive support online and not F2F. This is evident more in the treatment of remote and rural areas where connectivity is still a challenge. The changing landscape of the DL institutions calls for the tutors to perform the pastoral role differently, i.e., to adopt different strategies for urban contexts which enjoy connectivity and rural contexts which do not. It creates a conducive environment for learning to assist the students to adjust and understand the dynamics of DL and what is expected from them in that context (Seletso, 2010:7). The Institution and tutors should also deal with a lack of computer skills even if rurally based students have connections. The pastoral role should help the students to understand that online support is important for their learning journey by explaining its dynamics, complexities and benefits.

Then there is an issue about the availability of the tutors to attend to the students' queries. When the tutors are absent, this creates a communication gap between them and the students. Failure to manage the communication gap may lead to a misunderstanding between the students and tutors in DE (Moore, 1993). Communication is regarded as the best pedagogical practice in DL (Aksal, 2009:2) and it should be well managed (Moore, 1993). In DL, the students are physically separated from the lecturers/tutors so communication is regarded as a form of support. While the findings show that the ITM is a good programme, there is a need to revisit the issue of communication.

There were differing views regarding the quality of the ITM. The provision of quality tutorials is determined by the quality of tutors and their facilitation skills in supporting the students online and F2F. This motivates students to participate in the ITM which is currently a challenge. It is, therefore, important for the university to establish if potential

tutors are able to facilitate tutorials before they are employed. In this way, the ITM will be responsive to students' needs as indicated by Pfeffer and Coote (1991), who state that quality is achieved by meeting customer's needs that, in this case, are students. This is an indication that the university should recruit quality tutors in all the modules identified as high risk in the ITM otherwise the programme may not serve its purpose of supporting students to learn successfully (Dzakiria, 2005). On the other hand, the university has a duty to meet the service providers' needs by addressing the salary disparities between F2F and online tutors as raised by participants. By so doing, the Institution will be responding to customer satisfaction in its service to students.

The lack of commitment of the module lecturers in the ITM is another issue that was found to contribute to the quality of tutorials at Unisa. This suggests that stakeholders, such as tutors and lecturers, should work as a team to help the students to succeed. The fact that tutors are not supported academically by the module lecturers as expected creates a quality gap in the learning space. Tutors and lecturers cannot afford to operate in silos because the nature of DL expects them to have a team approach. According to Pyke and Sherlock (2010:2), tutors are expected to lead the learning process in DL and interact with students especially on the online environment. However, for the learning to be successful, they need to receive guidance from the module owners because they know what tutors should focus on in their tutoring and how to guide students into the right direction to achieve the learning outcomes.

Commitment to the tutoring programme means that lecturers and tutors work collaboratively and share information that assists with the delivery of the content F2F and online. Tutors should also work together as peers and share good practices and facilitation skills that work. Students will find it easy to work with the tutor if lecturers first work with tutors but students may only work with the lecturers because they believe that lecturers know the content better than the tutor. This finding is in line with the pragmatic approach towards quality which requires all participants or stakeholders to be involved in the service delivery (Green et al., 1993). Furthermore, according to Mannan (2009) and SAQA (2000), quality requires commitment and constant attention from all those

who are involved in the process.

Tutors cannot deliver quality tutorials and meet students' needs and expectations if there are limited resources provided by Unisa in regional service centres. The quality of resources is one of the criteria for quality provision in higher education and can promote or deter the quality of tutoring in DL environments (Green et al., 1993). There is therefore a link between quality tutorials and quality resources. This means that, if the ITM is to produce quality tutoring, it should provide quality resources that will enable tutors to execute their work without hindrances. In this way, Unisa will provide a positive learning experience to its students (Unisa, 2016a).

Students expressed their satisfaction about the content of the ITM in different modules. This is an indication that some tutors are doing well in the programme. This seems to be one of the strengths of the current ITM programme that coordinators should capitalise on to enhance quality and promote participation in the tutorials. However, students were not happy about the quality of communication from tutors especially on the quality of feedback provided to them. According to students, tutors provided feedback that lacked details in terms of specifying areas where students need to focus on to improve. Tutors are expected to provide quality feedback that will make a difference in the learning process and assist the student to progress to another level of understanding the content (CoL, 2009). This means that, upon receiving feedback, students should know if they have achieved the learning outcomes or not. When students receive feedback that does not help them to progress to a higher level of understanding the content, they become discouraged. According to Ertmer et al. (2007) and Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), feedback that makes a difference in the learning journey of a student is the one that corrects, improves and motivates the student. It is therefore important that tutors provide feedback that transforms the understanding of students to impact them positively and keep them in the programme.

Another finding in this study is that Unisa students do have access to regional computers (resources) to access and participate in the ITM. The computers in some centres were not functional. As a result, students found it difficult to interact at various

levels as expected by the Institution. This, therefore, creates a challenge because students cannot rely on the institutional computers to participate in online tutorials and respond to weekly activities posted on the Unisa Learning Management System (LMS), MyUnisa. This situation is predominant in regional centres that are in rural and remote areas. Students in these areas are more affected because they use these centres. The regional computers are the only means for them to access and participate in the tutorial programme. According to CoL (2009), student access to technology that is relevant for the programme/course is cited as a standard for managing quality in DL. It is thus important for students to have technology access that will help them to succeed.

The study found that some students participated and interacted with content online. However, it is a concern that their interaction was motivated by reasons such as getting answers for their assignments and dealing with previous examination questions. Some students did not interact at all; they were just lurkers who opened and viewed without saying anything online. Salmon's five stages of e-learning does not encourage students to merely log online and not contribute in the learning process. Pyke and Sherlock (2010:2) apply an empathy approach to tutoring and suggest that, to support such students to be actively involved in the process of interaction especially with other students, the tutor needs to assign a group or buddy to the student, and this kind of support could serve as a motivation. This support could even assist those who are shy to interact online because they will be compelled to interact with the buddy and respond to tasks assigned to them by the tutor.

Another finding reveals that access and participation in the ITM needs a collaborative approach to provide digital skills to students who did not have an opportunity to use a computer in their schools. As much as the regional staff are involved in the training of students on digital literacy skills, there was, however, a concern that this training should be intensified in order to close the digital divide created by the lack of technological skills among Unisa students and respond to the Africanisation of the ITM – for it to respond well to the plight of African students. This calls for more effort to be directed to rural and remote Unisa centres where training is needed the most. Most of the students

who find themselves in such areas are part of majority black Africans. If such digital training is enhanced for this group of students, they will gain independence as they engage in DL tutoring support and become self-directed in their learning (Dickinson, 1987; Rahmasari, 2017). This is what the ITM hopes to achieve by supporting students especially in their first year of study at Unisa.

The pathway in the Unisa LMS is an issue for Unisa students. This is evident from the fact that, since Unisa revamped the LMS, it is difficult for students to access MyUnisa/MyModules, thus contributing to their lack of participation. Easy access to a programme should be the first priority for Unisa as this is a learning tool that can either motivate or discourage students from participating in their learning. The researcher is of the view that complicated pathways to the LMS perpetuate the challenge of non-participation in the ITM. Similarly, the findings of the study conducted by Wilks et al. (2017) reveal that LMS access could be a challenge for students hence the institutions should find a way to simplify this. Tutors are tasked to assist students with the access of the LMS since they perform a technical role (Berge, 1995) and, according to Salmon's five stage of e-learning model, when tutors assist students with the access to the LMS, they are also able to motivate them to engage with other students and learn in a collaborative way (Salmon et al., 2010:170). Such learning together relates to an African culture which encourages communities to work together to solve problems which is still in practice now especially in black townships.

Yet another finding was that not all Unisa students enjoy the benefits of the ITM. Students in urban areas benefit more from the programme compared to the rural and remote areas. The biographical data shows that most students involved in the ITM are distributed in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, which are predominantly rural and remote. Because there are few centres servicing these students, they travel long distances to centres located in towns to access resources, such as computers, internet, and Wi-Fi, and participate in the video conference classes. This practice shows that the programme is not Africanised enough to accommodate all students irrespective of where they reside (Makgoba, 1997) and does not promote equity of access as stated in

the National Plan for Higher Education of South Africa (DoE, 2001:6). The Institution has not succeeded in closing the geographical gap that exists between the students and their tutors (Kobayashi, 2002). This gap contributes to perpetuating the unequal treatment of students (Van der Berg, 2005). The findings show that there are efforts made to close the gap, however, the university is not doing enough to close the geographical gap that still exists.

The economic background of students is another issue that excludes and deters students from accessing the centres to benefit from the ITM. Most students from poor rural and remote areas do not have the finances to travel to the centres to attend F2F classes or engage in online discussions regularly. Such students are left behind and excluded from the programme because there are no repeats of the sessions. Some try to fit into the system by relocating to the urban area centres where there are multiple resources that will support them in their studies but this is often done against their wishes as they are forced to do this by their circumstances. The government is aware of the exclusion of some students especially those mentioned earlier. It commented that the system does not respond to the access needs of students, instead, students have to go out of their way to ensure that they participate in this system which does not accommodate their backgrounds (DHET, 2012:7). According to Henderikx (1992), such practices reflect a quality that does not display flexibility of support that seeks to transform students' lives and meet their expectations to study wherever they are as entrenched in the DE framework (Gumbo, 2016a; Sithole et al., 2013:2).

The technology infrastructure in the centres does not respond to students' needs, especially those coming from poor communities. An internet connection is the only means that students can rely on to connect with their tutors and interact on content related matters wherever they are (Hillman et al., 1994; Chikoko, 2016). However, this is not the case in some centres because connectivity is a challenge. Even though Unisa provides Wi-Fi access to these centres, internet continues to be weak in some parts of the country which prevents students from participating in classes conducted via video conferencing and video streaming. Electricity load shedding is another factor that adds

to the challenge of internet connectivity. Technology infrastructure goes hand-in-hand with the digital literacy needed by students. This kind of literacy is crucial in DL because it is an enabler for students to participate in the learning space.

The programme is beneficial to students who have access to it. However, the resources used to facilitate learning between students and tutors are insufficient to support the proper implementation of the ITM, hence, the resources and their quality should be evaluated to ensure that they fulfil the intended purpose. According to Stavropoulou and Stroubouki (2014), for any programme to be effective, its resources should be subjected to evaluation. For students to participate effectively in the learning process, they need to have quality resources which will assist them to meet their learning needs. Unisa is passionate about supporting its students hence it is important to ensure that sufficient and effective resources are allocated to this programme (Wang, 2010:145).

Interaction between the students and tutors should be subjected to evaluation given the fact that students felt that this area needs the attention of the university. The researcher's observation reveals that the interaction between the tutor and students can stimulate the students' interest and motivate them to be active and learn. Moore (1989:4) states that the student-tutor interaction attempts to motivate and stimulate the student and allows for the clarification of any misunderstanding by the student regarding content. It is therefore important that the interaction between tutor and students be evaluated because interaction forms the core of learning. It closes the physical and psychological distances between the two parties and enhances learning (Moore, 1993; Pyke & Sherlock, 2010).

Students were not happy about the quality of feedback from tutors and the turnaround times. This means that their needs were not met in this area. Feedback can impact on students' learning progress and serve as a motivation to students studying with DL. According to Mackiewicz and Thompson (2014), tutors can employ a variety of strategies to motivate their students during F2F and online tutorial sessions. One of those strategies is to give them positive feedback online and verbal rewards during F2F classes such as commenting positively on their responses. Such comments boost their

confidence to participate and become actively involved in their learning. Ertmer et al. (2007:413) indicate that, when students receive feedback from the tutor, it assists them to reflect, correct and clarify what good performance is. Furthermore, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) suggest that feedback serves as a form of formative assessment designed to improve and accelerate learning. In support of these authors, a case study conducted by Pyke and Sherlock (2010:2), which analysed the tutor-student feedback online, reveals that corrective feedback was the most popular on the list followed by motivational feedback.

Finally, another major finding in this study was the fact that the ITM was not integrated as it should be. The findings reveal that the university is still running two parallel tutor support programmes instead of an integrated one. This is evident from the differences that still exist within the programme. There are some activities that are done with e-tutors but are not done with F2F tutors even when the context permits the integration of such activities.

The support provided by academic staff to tutors is not fully integrated and balanced in both modes of support. This is evident from the resources provided for F2F tutors and e-tutors. More support, in terms of resources such as textbooks, is given to e-tutors, while F2F tutors' provision of textbooks is delayed or not provided at all. Some colleges do not provide guidelines for F2F tutors however this is consistent in e-tutor support. The induction of tutors about academic matters by the module-specific lecturers is not done for all tutors. Tutors should be on the same level of content knowledge and understanding of the outcomes for the year.

Not all F2F tutors are included in the online platform, which makes this kind of mode one-sided in terms of developing the F2F tutors in technology developments in DL. According to Wilks et al. (2017), even though the programme provides valuable support to students, it should not become static in terms of the latest developments. This suggests that the integration of the F2F tutors in the online platform should be revisited as this can contribute into their development in technology. This integration can assist with the issue of continuity as tutors will be able to continue with the discussions that

were handled in the F2F mode to the online mode. This kind of integration will enhance participation and interaction that was started in a physical classroom setting.

Furthermore, the findings in terms of integration showed that some tutors operate on both platforms and are aware of the disparities between F2F and e-tutor support, hence, they resign from F2F which needs them to work harder and spend money travelling. These tutors prefer e-tutoring which pays well and does not require them to put in extra effort. Hence, the call for the equal payment of all tutors to retain F2F tutorial support for those who need it. The university needs to strike a balance between F2F and e-tutor support. Integration will assist in meeting the needs of students who need this kind of support.

The findings are based on the four theories which were adopted as pillars of this study, i.e., social constructivism (which is the main theory of the study), connectivism, Salmon's five stage model of e-learning and empathy theory. These theories were found relevant for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the support programme in that students who use the ITM connect through MyUnisa platform and interact with one another at different levels online, i.e., with the content when they engage with material, with each other as they discuss the content of the module, with the tutor and with the interface (MyUnisa platform). During these interactions, students come together online and F2F and bring a wealth of experience and knowledge from their cultural contexts (Higgs, 2016b:96), become actively involved in the construction of new knowledge and solve assignment problems and tasks given by their tutors (Driscoll, 2000; Beck & Kosnik, 2006). Because students work together as peers and support one another while the tutor is in the background observing the direction of the interaction, such peer support promotes the spirit of oneness in the learning spaces (Mudimbe, 1988; Assie-Lumumba, 2016). This is where the Ubuntu philosophy features, especially among Africans students, because they understand that they need each other to succeed.

For this theory to work, students should be actively involved in the learning space and construct reality as they understand it given the fact that knowledge does not exist until it is created by individuals (Amineh & Asl, 2015:13) who come together for this purpose.

It is therefore important that safe spaces be created to promote students' engagement and celebrate their different cultures. These spaces are created by tutors who provide access and motivate them to participate and interact with the content and one another, as reflected in Salmon's five stage model of e-learning. Such spaces allow students to develop as individuals and be independent in their learning because they know that they are supported. This suggests that, for students to be able to respond to the assignment questions and be confident of their answers, they need to connect to the internet, be active in the ITM platforms and assist one another as submitted in the sub-themes 6.3.1.2 and 6.3.1.5. Social constructivists are of the view that connectivity plays an important role in the process of learning because participants need to connect for them to learn. Connectivism characterises knowledge as a flow through a network of humans and non-humans (Bell, 2009:15), and provides spaces to connect at a global level (Chikoko, 2016).

The findings of this study established that students from the remote and rural areas report that, on many occasions, they are unable to connect and get tutored through video conferencing and live streaming because of weak internet access (see sub-theme 6.3.3.1). According to Bell (2011:4), connectivity assists with the distribution of knowledge to students who learn individually and as a team because they participate actively in a social learning environment. This suggests that if there is poor or no connectivity, the promotion of online participation and interaction will be a futile exercise. Consequently, such challenges limit and exclude students from benefiting in the programme. This system also continues to promote injustices of the past because students are denied opportunities to engage online and construct meaning as they understand it within their cultural contexts.

Students also need to have relevant devices and digital skills that will enable them to contribute and gain from the tutorial support. Without meeting these requirements, connectivity alone will not be able to transform and shape the academic lives of students (Siemens, 2005; Salmon et al., 2010). While it is a personal responsibility to acquire devices, institutions have developed a culture of supplying tablets and laptops

to students especially considering the financial constraints of majority of students. Unisa is currently meeting this need by supplying laptops to students which are loaded with programmes and content.

Then there is the issue of expensive data bundles coupled with affordability. If students are not on campus, they need data bundles to connect and engage in the learning activities. Given the socio-economic backgrounds of some students, they cannot afford data which can enable them to access the online platform and construct knowledge collaboratively in the learning process. For the students, it is difficult and expensive to exchange information online. Hence, they travel to the centres to connect. To some extent, the university is trying to address the data challenges by providing a reverse billing when students access MyUnisa off campus, however, there are challenges for some students because they indicated that this system needs funds to access it and it cannot function if there is no data in the device they use. Furthermore, students indicated that changes in the MyUnisa platform depletes data and they are forced to purchase data to log onto the LMS but they are often not able to finish the work because of data problems.

The connectivist theory of learning is closely linked to Salmon's five stage model of e-learning which guides online learning and promotes active learning and development. For this model to function, it needs students to connect online and quality ICT hardware, software and network (Moule, 2007:37). The study reveals that students in rural and remote areas find it difficult to engage online due to poor ICT resources in the centres, including poor internet access. According to Salmon et al. (2010), the first stage of e-learning, i.e., access and motivation, should be executed first before the students can proceed to the next level of e-learning. The biographical data shows that majority of students involved in the ITM are first level students and this suggests that, because of their unfavourable socio-economic background, they may not have financial power to purchase data to access the internet. By not having a financial means to access internet or go to the centre on a regular basis, they are excluded from the ITM support. These students may not be able to move to the second stage of e-learning, which is online

socialisation, where they are expected to construct knowledge as a team because there is an access challenge not only to the network connections but to computers too. As much as students show willingness to socialise and negotiate meaning online with their peers, without proper devices, they will not be able to do so. The Institution started providing laptops to students as stated above, however, these laptops never reached all students and this continues to perpetuate unfair practices to students in the rural areas since the roll-out started in urban areas.

Stage three requires students to give and receive relevant and useful information about the course and undertake the course-related learning tasks. Stage four requires students to engage in more complex constructive tasks, and interact and collaborate with their peers, and stage five is where student development is evident after they have gone through all the stages of e-learning. Students can go through these stages and perform the concomitant activities only if there is connectivity and relevant devices. Without this, the students cannot execute the learning tasks and negotiate meaning as needed (Hoover, 1996). This is the reason why the empathy approach to teaching and learning should be extended by the Institution for such students.

The findings further showed that the students are not satisfied about the response time tutors take to answer their online questions. When students post questions, they need to be attended within 48 hours as per service charter of the Institution, otherwise they feel that the Institution does not value them as customers (Sallis & Hingley, 1991; Henderikx, 1992). When tutors do not respond to students timeously, this shows an absence of empathy in their tutoring. Assignment feedback should prepare students for the examinations however, if they receive feedback after the examinations, it does not serve any purpose. This calls for the Institution to ensure a suitable frequency of assignments or project submissions and the constant availability of tutors and advisers online and F2F (Holmberg, 2007:432). This suggests that the tutors should be in a position to provide not only prompt feedback but feedback that identifies areas which need improvement in order for students to develop in the fifth stage of e-learning (Salmon et al., 2010). Students also feel discouraged from continuing their participation

in the ITM programme since they do not get help at the time they most need it. Tutors are asked to be empathetic in their interactions with students because students are diverse. Some need to be guided with care that will motivate and encourage them to continue in the programme and not drop out (Holmberg, 2001:71).

The issue of communication from the regional offices does not promote empathy because students travel to attend classes and, when they get to the centre, they find that tutorials have been cancelled. Such practices do not show care and quality service for students. Baath (1980 cited by Holmberg, 2004:83) states that frequent communication with students closes communication gaps and increases the quality of service.

The findings therefore reveal particular weaknesses in the ITM as described in Chapter Three. These weaknesses are highlighted in terms of CIPP which was adopted in Chapter Four (see Table 7.2).

**Table 7.2: Weaknesses in the ITM as they surface from the findings**

| The ITM | CIPP | Findings | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Positive aspects** | **Negative aspects/weaknesses** |
| Students' needs and expectations:<br>• Provision of tutor support<br>• Enhanced communication<br>• Prompt feedback<br>• MyLife e-mail account<br>• Easy access to online ITM activities<br>• Incentivisation of participation<br>• Students' | Context | • ITM is a good support programme for Unisa students<br>• Provision of F2F support on high-risk modules and online tutorial support<br>• Good quality tutorials<br>• Provision of student orientations by the regions | • Communication from the university is a serious challenge<br>• Lack of prompt and quality feedback from tutors<br>• Students do not read their MyLife e-mails<br>• Difficult access to online platform<br>• Students who participate in the ITM are not incentivised<br>• Rurally based students are forced by circumstances to travel or move to urban areas to access the ITM resources |

| The ITM | CIPP | Findings | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Positive aspects** | **Negative aspects/weaknesses** |
| orientation days | | | |
| Physical resources:<br>• Provision of resources in the regional service centres<br>• Telecentres are used as access points for students<br>• ITM stakeholders plan | Input | • Extended access to Unisa students through telecentres<br>• Involvement of all stakeholders in the tutor recruitment process<br>• F910 communication system for F2F tutorial support<br>• Availability of Wi-Fi in the centres | • Lack of capacity building in the telecentres<br>• Lack of collaborative planning among stakeholders of the ITM<br>• Under-resourced regional centres in the rural and remote areas, e.g. computers and continued connectivity |
| Processes:<br>• F2F tutor recruitment<br>• Facilitation skills<br>• Student-student interaction<br>• Tutor-tutor interaction<br>• Tutor-lecturer relationship<br>• Students in rural and remote areas | Process | • F2F Tutor evaluation by the regional staff<br>• E-tutor evaluation by academic staff<br>• Digital literacy training of students on Microsoft package | • Academics recommending their own candidates and not those recommended from the regions as per the selection list<br>• Potential F2F tutors are not assessed on facilitation skills<br>• F2F peer tutoring support does not promote socialisation and Ubuntu<br>• Lack of Ubuntu between tutors as they do not work as a team to share best practices in their tutoring<br>• Poor relationship between tutors and module lecturers<br>• Distance travelled to access Unisa resources is a challenge for students especially in North-Eastern Region |
| Product:<br>• Provision of integrated tutor | Product | • ITM (partly) meets the needs of students | • ITM does not meet the expectations of the students. |

| The ITM | CIPP | Findings | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Positive aspects** | **Negative aspects/weaknesses** |
| support<br>• Integrated part of the model | | | • Online and F2F activities in the ITM are not integrated. |

Based on the gaps identified in the ITM as per Table 7.2, the study contributes a modified ITM model as described in the next section.

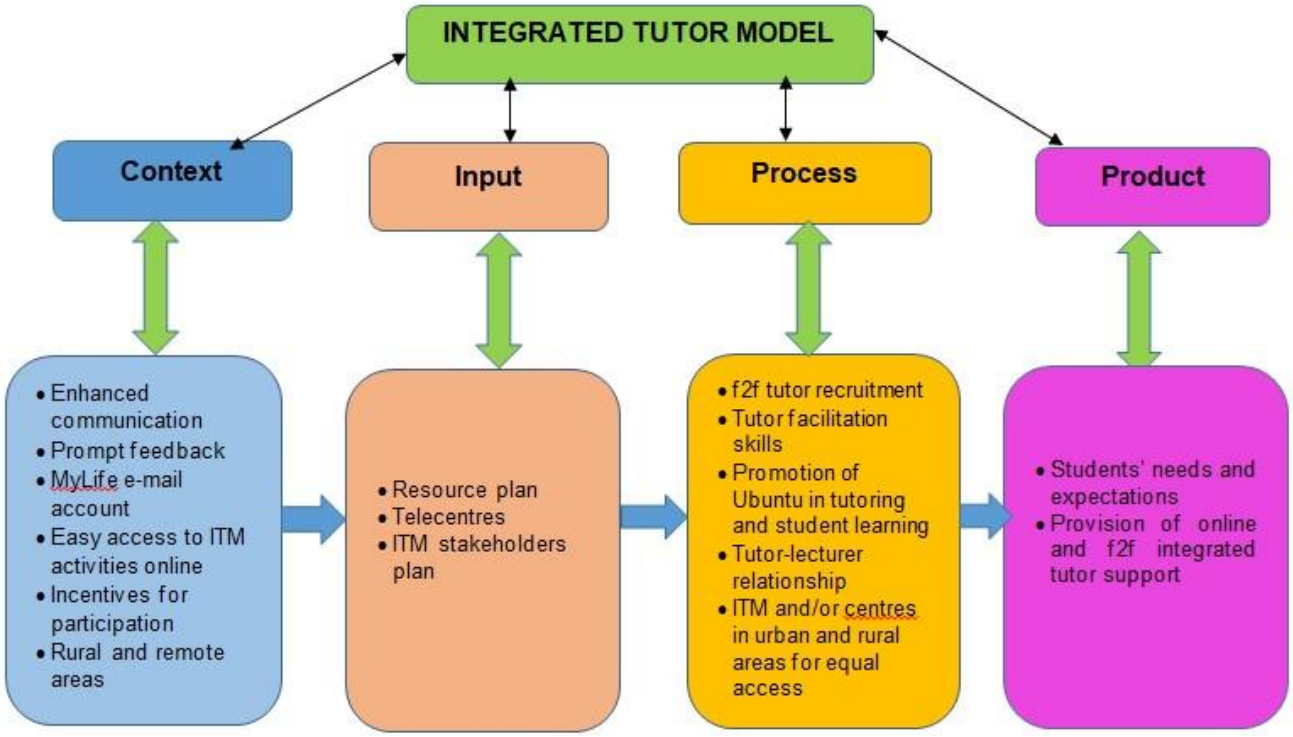


**Figure 7.7: Improved integrated tutor model**

## 7.11 The contribution of the study

In the light of the findings and their discussion, this study contributes an improvement to the ITM in response to weaknesses identified in it (see Figure 7.7).

### 7.11.1 Context related improvements

- Enhanced communication: The Institution should consider other channels of communication to improve the level of communication at Unisa. This could include formalised social media platforms such as the chat box with a tracking system to student queries for the ITM. This will assist the Institution to limit unattended queries. The use of WhatsApp Social media is a space where students are active, and this space should be explored to enhance communication at Unisa. Students should not be disadvantaged by the fact that Unisa lacks communication when there are so many platforms available to improve it. As much as Unisa uses the official MyLife emails to communicate with students, it should also explore the use of other forms of communication which are popular among students such as WhatsApp.
- Link e-mail accounts: For improved communication, students should be encouraged to link their private e-mail accounts to MyLife e-mail account. This strategy would mean that students do not miss any communications from the Institution.
- Prompt feedback: Develop a monitoring strategy that would monitor the 48-hour turnaround time to students' queries and assignments.
- Easy access to online ITM activities: The development of an application that would assist with an easy access to MyUnisa, MyModules and tutorial support platforms that would help students to access the platform faster and save costs.
- Incentivise participation: Allocation of marks for students' participation on ITM will not only increase participation but will also motivate students to learn.
- Rural and remote areas students: The programme does not provide full support to students from remote areas and adjustments should be made to accommodate these students. Students should not go in search of support but support should come to students.

### 7.11.2 Input related improvements

- ITM stakeholders plan: All stakeholders need to plan together and incorporate the ITM plans into the college plan.
- Resource plan for the regions: The development of the physical resource plan for the regional service centres and hubs across the country will assist the university to standardise the provision of resources for all centres. Focus should be given to centres located in remote and rural areas.
- Telecentres: Capacitating telecentres is necessary to ensure that students who access and use these centres get quality service. Staff contracted by Unisa to service Unisa students will assist to provide information and quality service that upholds Unisa's reputation. These staff members should preferably be Unisa students on the 3rd year level who are currently enrolled with the Institution because they will have relevant information to guide students.

### 7.11.3 Process related improvements

- *Tutor recruitment:* Regions are responsible for receiving walk-in applications however, the challenge is that when the list of candidates is sent to the academic colleges, upon its return, regions find that the list is different from the one submitted to them. Colleges submit a new list. This is a flaw in the process.
- *Facilitation skills:* Every tutor who operates in the ITM should be evaluated in order to assess his/her facilitation skills. This will help him/her to deal with the different learning styles of students assigned to him/her.
- *Africanising tutor support:*
    - *Student-to-student interaction:* Currently student-student interaction occurs formally online however, this area can be improved by formalising the F2F interaction of students which is currently happening informally. This type of interaction will enhance peer collaborative learning among students, encourage autonomy and promote Ubuntu in the learning process.

- *Tutor-tutor interaction:* There is no platform that promotes tutor-tutor interaction in the ITM or the Communities of Practice. Promotion of tutor-tutor- interaction or COP formation is essential for tutors to learn the best practices of tutoring from each another and Ubuntu will be promoted in this manner.

- *Tutor-lecturer relationship:* The university needs to commit the lecturers by strengthening their job descriptions regarding learner support and account for it in their performance agreements.

### 7.11.4 Product related improvements

- *Integrated part of the model:* Integration of tutor processes like induction, provision of resources, and access to online platform for specific modules.
- *Provision of integrated tutor support:* The ITM partly meets the needs of students and does not meet students' expectations.

## 7.12 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the study, triangulated the qualitative and quantitative findings and discussed them. The profile of participants is predominantly African females who are in their first year of study and 21.2% have poor online skills. The findings also reveal that students value the university's support through the ITM. However, the barriers to benefitting from the programme are resources such as internet and non-functional resources in rural and remote areas. This finding is in line with what the Department of Higher Education is doing to address the problem, i.e., a rollout of laptops and the provision of data for students to learn wherever they are. The study also established that communication was a serious challenge at Unisa and this compromises quality in the whole ITM system because students were not receiving feedback as expected. The findings on access and participation indicated that students would like to participate however, there were challenges that prevented them doing so. The study further found that the ITM needs to be Africanised by including all students who need

this kind of support by providing relevant skills and resources. To improve the ITM to meet students' needs and expectations, the study reveals that resources, F2F tutorials, online tutor feedback and interaction between tutors and students should be subjected to evaluation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings in relation to the theories that guided this study, which led to the identification of the areas that need improvement to close the gaps in the ITM following the CIPP model of evaluation, as well as the contribution of the ITM improvement presented in Figure 7.7. In the next and final chapter, conclusions are drawn and recommendation for future research are made.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

# SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the researcher presented the findings, integrated both the qualitative and quantitative findings, discussed them, and suggested an improved ITM in view of the findings by using the CIPP model of evaluation. In this chapter, the researcher presents the summary of the study, limitations and conclusions, and makes relevant recommendations.

## 8.2 Summary of the study

This section presents a summary of the eight chapters that make up this study**.** In Chapter One, the researcher introduced the study by providing its background. A gap in the existing literature was identified in as far as tutoring and the ITM in DE are concerned. Resultantly, a problem statement and related main and sub-research questions were stated. Assumptions informed by the research problem were also stated. The aim and objectives were also stated in line with the research questions. The significance of the study, overview of the research methodology and definitions of key terms used in the study were presented. The chapter concluded by providing the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two discussed the theories that framed the study methodologically down to the findings. Social constructivism was the overarching theory in the study. Other theories that supported social constructivism are connectivism, Salmon's five stages of e-learning and empathy theories. Justification of the use of these theories was given. The criticisms levelled against them were also mentioned in the chapter. The implications and application of these theories in the study were stated and a synergy between them formed at the end which formed a unified framework for the study.

Chapter Three presented the review of relevant scholarly literature mainly focusing on

tutoring in DL. This included the description of the concepts related to tutoring and the role of tutors. Literature regarding the history of tutoring in DL was also reviewed and discussed in detail. Chapter Four continued the review of the literature turning the focus onto quality in tutoring in the DL space. The chapter also contextualised the phenomenon of tutoring and the ITM Africanisation in as far as tutoring is concerned. Finally, models of evaluation relevant for DL were explored which would help with the evaluation of the ITM ultimately.

Chapter Five presented the research design and methodology for the study. A discussion of paradigms, methods and instruments was done with the resultant choices and their justification clarified. The processes followed to analyse the qualitative and quantitative data that were outlined in detail. Lastly, the chapter accounted for the treatment of ethics.

In Chapter Six, the qualitative data (individual interviews, focus groups and document analysis) were analysed under five themes which were developed in accordance with the research questions, and findings were presented. Chapter Seven analysed and presented the quantitative data and mixed both the qualitative and quantitative findings. The discussion of the findings in this area was also presented.

Chapter Eight concludes the study by providing this summary, presenting the main findings of the study, accounting for the limitations encountered during the study and addressing the assumptions presented in the first chapter. This chapter also presents the recommendations that can assist in the improvement of the ITM.

## 8.3 Main research findings of the study

The findings of the study were systematically analysed to build an argument using factors from the analysis and interpretation of the themes which were sub-divided into five major themes. The findings are compatible with the theoretical framework presented in Chapter Two and the reviewed literature in Chapters Three and Four. This study showed that tutor support has a bigger role to play in the academic life of every

student, specifically in a DL environment. The findings reveal that students' needs are partly met by the University because students do receive F2F and online tutor support in some modules. However, students' expectations in terms of receiving teaching through tutors, tutors providing them with answers for their assignments, fully fledge resource provision in the learning centres and receiving technical support from tutors are not being met. The quality of tutors and tutoring need to be improved in some areas as discussed in the findings. Students were not impressed by the quality of resources in the centres which impacted on the quality of tutoring particularly in remote and rural areas. Students' access to the ITM and participation took place but were limited by the connectivity and costs in different parts of the country. The fact that students come from different socio-economic backgrounds affected the effectiveness of the ITM in their learning, hence some students had to travel or move to urban areas in search of better support.

### 8.3.1 Students needs and expectations

The findings reveal that the ITM is a good support programme and students welcomed it since it assists them to adjust in the DL environment. To a certain extent, the university met the needs of students because students received tutorial support in some of the modules identified as high-risk. As much as students seemed to be satisfied with this support, some problematic modules were not in the list of high-risk modules offered through the F2F mode. Instead, they were only offered online which was insufficient as they needed support from both modes. Their expectations of receiving teaching from tutors were not met. This suggests that Unisa should make effort to forge an understanding of its students' expectations. Serious communication challenges in the Institution were identified in the findings; tutors were not responding to students' queries online and were unavailable at times they were needed by students, which frustrated and demotivated students.

### 8.3.2 The quality of the ITM

The study reveals that there were differing opinions about the issue of quality in the

ITM. The findings showed that students were happy about the quality of content provided to them. However, this should be improved by capacitating the tutors' facilitation skills which seemed to be lacking. The findings also reveal that the quality of feedback given by tutors was not good enough because it lacked details to guide students in terms of areas of improvement. The quality of support received by tutors compromised the quality of tutoring in the sense that tutors and lecturers did not work together as expected. The low quality of resources, especially the quality of technological resources in rural and remote areas, also hindered the delivery of quality tutorials in some centres.

### 8.3.3 Access to ITM and participation

The state of resources provided in the centres by the Institution determines the quality of access and interaction among students, between students and tutors and between students and the content. The findings in this theme reveal that access and participation in the ITM in the Unisa centres is affected by the low quality of resources in those centres. Although the availability of resources in the centres was cited as a positive effort made by the Institution to provide students with the opportunities to access and participate in the ITM, the quality of resources was questionable in the sense that some resources are dysfunctional and some do not have the necessary software that is compatible with their modules. Consequently, such challenges prevented students from enjoying these resources and participating as expected. Another finding was that students participated in the ITM for different reasons and, if they did not get what they expected, for example, answers to their assignments, they dropped out of the programme and opted for just viewing and not contributing in the online discussions as expected.

The lengthy pathway to MyUnisa LMS was identified as a challenge for students. Their participation was limited by the fact that they could not afford data to interact with and learn from other students and some did not have their own devices to access the ITM. Rural students faced challenges with their digital illiteracy as they never had the opportunity to use a computer in the basic education years of study. This suggests the

plight of poor students, the majority of whom are Africans who need to be trained to be technologically competent.

### 8.3.4 Africanisation of the ITM

The ITM can be made to be user-friendly for African students by ensuring that all students from rural and remote areas who did not have the opportunity to be exposed to computers are capacitated with computer skills. Such training will assist them to be independent as DL students and be able to access and interact online with other students and their tutors. It should be noted that majority of the students who find themselves in rural and remote areas are from majority black Africans. Over and above the training, the provision of computers and data to students would assist them to access and participate in the ITM programme wherever they are and feel included. The distance travelled by some students in remote areas to the centres to access computers and the internet is a financial challenge for students. As a result, such students are excluded from participating in the programme, which gives them an impression that the Institution does not care about them. The reduction in the number of centres by the Institution presented challenges for students who have to travel distances to access the centres.

### 8.3.5 Improvement of the ITM

Based on the issues presented in the discussion above, the findings show that the programme should be improved by providing equity of access and ensuring that centres are resourced with functional and sufficient computers in order to increase participation in the programme. Students should be rewarded with a mark that will motivate them to participate in the ITM. Increasing the efforts made by regional staff to train students on digital literacy will be an advantage for students in rural areas to function online. Facilitation skills of applicants who show interest in tutoring should be assessed as this will assist such tutors to provide quality tutoring. The quality of feedback provided by tutors should be improved to assist students to move to another level of learning and achieving the outcomes of the modules as expected. The quality of communication

should be revisited by the Institution as it impedes the institutional goal of providing positive learning experiences to students. Lastly, the ITM should be fully integrated and not run two parallel models. This should be done by integrating the processes and procedures that seem to be a problem to the integration of the programme.

## 8.4 Limitations of study

The limitations in this study are noted and acknowledged by the researcher as described below.

### 8.4.1 Unavailability of participants and inclusion of the Student Representative Council members

Some participants were not available for interviews due to personal reasons and had to be replaced by others who were available at the time of interviews. The inclusion of the members of the student body in the focused group interviews was a challenge in the sense that they sometimes dominated the conversation which was a disadvantage to those who were not outspoken. They should have been separated.

### 8.4.2 Data collection through Lime Survey

The plan for quantitative data collection was to use the Lime Survey questionnaire. However, the response rate was not good and the researcher opted to use hard copies that were distributed in the study centres of the regions during the centre visits. Due to the fact that some students could not access computers during the data collection period which coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak and put the whole country on lockdown, some students could not access the computer laboratories in the Unisa centres to participate in the study.

### 8.4.3 Qualitative data collection process

Data were collected from the tutors available during the researcher's visit to the regional centres. Disruptions caused by Covid-19 called for the change of F2F interviews for some participants to the use of technology to interview them. This was a challenge for

some participants in other parts of the country because of poor connectivity. To those who agreed to continue with F2F interviews, the researcher had to meet with them in the place where they were comfortable.

### 8.4.4 Availability of tutors

The study was limited to tutors who had at least three years' experience at Unisa and who were involved in both modes of tutoring, i.e., online and F2F. One region did not have a tutor operating in both modes and a tutor from another region was interviewed instead.

### 8.4.5 Bias

The researcher's commitment to dealing with bias helped her to avoid being influenced by personal bias while conducting this study. However, this might have been compromised to some extent. The researchers' knowledge of how the ITM operates at Unisa may also have affected the interpretation of the collected data, which she undertook on her own. Furthermore, the fact that the researcher is an employee at Unisa implicated bias. To mitigate bias in the study, the researcher applied reflexivity. According to Probst and Berenson (2014:820), reflexivity is the researcher's awareness of the influence she has on what she is studying and how the research process affects her. The researcher was therefore reflexive by ensuring that she continuously reflected on her own engagements with the participants in the process of data collection and also during analysis. She was able to establish and communicate the grounds for rigour and trustworthiness throughout the study, while putting her own judgments in abeyance.

## 8.5 Conclusion

The aim of the current research was to evaluate the effectiveness of the ITM at Unisa. The attempts made thus far have enabled the researcher to achieve this aim through addressing the research objectives. Hence, findings provided the answers to the research questions. Unisa is making a good effort to meet students' needs by providing support on high-risk modules using both modes of learning, i.e., F2F and online. The

University needs to intensify its student support programme through the ITM to ensure that students' needs and expectations are fully met. The quality of the content provided by tutors is good except that the F2F tutors' facilitation skills are still lacking to some extent. The quality of tutorials is compromised by the quality of resources available at the centres. The quality of communication between the University and students is also a serious challenge that needs attention.

Furthermore, Unisa has succeeded in providing resources in the regional service centres to open access to the ITM and the participation of students in this programme, except that they are not good quality resources, thus affecting the participation and interaction of students on different levels. The long pathway to access the MyUnisa platform limits students who do not have the financial means to purchase data and participate. Not having personal devices adds to the access and participation problem in the ITM. There exists a geographical gap for students located in the rural and remote areas to access the ITM and benefit equally as students in the urban areas. This disadvantages mainly African students. In addition, students from rural areas and those who were never exposed to computers exhibit digital illiteracy. Some other gaps in the current ITM are exhibited in the findings, e.g., non-incentivising of students for their efforts to participate in the ITM, insufficient provisioning of computers in the regions, lack of capacity in the telecentre staff, etc. Hence, the assumptions made in Chapter One are confirmed, which indicate that, as much as Unisa is making effort to provide support to students through the ITM to succeed, the programme has some gaps and does not fully respond to students' needs and expectations as it should. In the light of this, the study makes a valuable contribution by suggesting the improved ITM described in Chapter Seven.

## 8.6 Recommendations

To Unisa:

- Prioritise Unisa alumni. It is important that a tutor who operates in the DL environment understands the dynamics and challenges faced by students

studying within DL. Unisa Alumni, unlike non-Unisa alumni, are able to guide students into the right direction and empathise with them because they understand what they are going through.

- Explore the integration of the social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Chat box in the Unisa communication package to enhance communication between students and tutors. This is where policy makers at Unisa come in and should make some recommendations to the Institution since effective communication is crucial in every organisation.
- Find ways to encourage students to link their MyLife e-mail accounts to their private e-mail accounts. This will assist in ensuring that communication sent by the University is received and read by students. A short cut using an application may also be considered to assist students to cut data costs. This recommendation is significant in this study as it responds to the different profiles of the students and how they can be supported by the Institution through the ITM.
- Allocate marks for students who actively participate in the ITM (F2F and online) as this will motivate students to make effort to participate instead of making this an optional activity. Consequently, participation may improve because students will be motivated by receiving a mark towards their final examinations.
- Pilot new innovations in the rural and remote areas. This will assist the innovators to see whether new advances that are introduced in the University work in the rural areas. This recommendation will also address the issue of provision of resources to the learning centre in rural and remote areas. If students in these areas receive appropriate resources such as computers and are trained on how to use them, their participation level will increase because they are technologically empowered.
- Employ staff on contract basis in the telecentres. These staff members will assist Unisa students with relevant and accurate information instead of them relying on telecentre owners/staff who do not have accurate information about the processes and procedures of the University. The implementation of this

recommendation will assist in increasing access because students will be motivated to use telecentres to effectively knowing that they will receive quality service which is crucial for DL students.

- Review the job descriptions of the academic staff to include tutor support so that it becomes compulsory for them to support tutors who are tutoring their modules. This will improve the quality of tutoring and improve the stakeholders' relationship in this programme.
- Fully integrate the tutor model for it to qualify to be an integrated model and to assist in managing its processes and procedures with ease. The ITM committee is in a position to influence this recommendation by advising the Management Committee (MANCOM) to ensure that this programme responds to the needs of students.

Further studies:

- Research learner-community interaction as an added type of interaction.
- Conduct studies about CoPs among tutors of the same module to intensify Ubuntu and teamwork.
- Explore the role played by WhatsApp social media in enhancing communication in the ITM and ensuring continuous communication between the tutor and students.

# RESEARCHER'S PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY IN THIS STUDY

The journey of my study was worth it. Even though it presented many challenges, at the same time, it reminded me that the journey to success is not smooth. When I started this journey, I knew what I wanted to investigate. There were so many challenges in the ITM. However, my challenge was to identify and phrase a topic correctly. When I finally chose the topic, I almost changed it because of the influence I was confronted with from fellow researchers. I was made to believe that an evaluative study takes too long and I would never complete my study in three or four years. Thanks to my supervisor, Prof Mishack T. Gumbo, who arranged a special meeting with me to talk about this and encouraged me by saying that the topic is fine and can be done. What encouraged me the most during our meeting is that he said, "Ms Ntuli, you are a very hardworking person and I am sure you will make it and you will not take long to finish your PhD". These words made me focus and concentrate on his guidance and supervision which helped me to realise that I can make it only if I am determined and put my mind into the study.

The beginning of each new chapter was one of my challenges because I did not know how to approach the chapter. However, with the good guidance that I received from my supervisor, I acquired skills that assisted me to ask critical questions that gave me a light on how to best approach the chapter to link with the chapter that follows. The feedback from my supervisor was very challenging, requiring my critical thinking and further search of literature in order not to present assumptions but facts backed by credible literature. Sometimes, the questions that he asked made me think that I was not equal to the task or PhD material. However, a spirit of determination made me reflect and think deeply about the questions asked so that I could respond as a scholar in the making and not just as an ordinary student.

When I was busy with my literature review, my supervisor challenged me to co-author a conference paper with him and be the first author as part of the training to be a researcher. The paper was co-presented with him and published in the 9$^{th}$ Annual Unisa

ISTE Conference on Mathematics, Science and Technology Education. Our paper was selected for a special Perspectives in Education Issue which was published in 2019. During the time of writing these papers, I had to put my studies on hold for a while to focus on them. The feedback that came from the reviewers was also challenging and required us to reflect and do the necessary corrections before they could be published.

I have learnt to be flexible as the situation dictates. During my data collection, there was a coronavirus outbreak. This prevented me from continuing with data collection in the centres which I had not covered yet. I had already made plans to travel, but unfortunately, I had to use other modes to collect data. This meant that I had to sacrifice time and be available to conduct the interviews as dictated by the participants' availability. The students' uprisings were also a challenge in the sense that I had to reschedule my centre visits to Eastern Cape twice.

**Highlights of the study**

Putting my studies on hold for a while to work on the papers was valuable because papers were published as stated above. A lot of positive things came out of this exercise because I acquired academic writing skills and other skills, such as preparing a presentation for the conference, analysing and responding to the reviewers' feedback. The reviewers' feedback also helped to shape my thoughts about my study. This was worth spending sleepless nights!

The prompt response from my supervisor was quite motivational because I knew that, when I submitted my work, I would not wait for more than two weeks for quality feedback that made me think deeply and respond accordingly in order to build a good argument of the facts I presented in the study. I was impressed by the fact that if my supervisor was unable to respond within two weeks, according to his supervision ethics, he communicated a new date in which he would respond to me. I must say that there was never a time when I had to wait for many weeks for feedback from him. This is one of the strengths of a good supervisor.

**Lessons learnt**

The first and biggest lesson I learnt in this journey is that every person's journey is unique. Another student's experience cannot be my experience hence it is important to start the journey and put all effort in to reach the finish line. I learnt to be determined and to sacrifice personal time to achieve the goal set for the month or the week. I learnt to balance between my job, which is quite demanding, my family and still have time for my studies. The application of ethics in research is key because the CEDU REC Committee helped me to focus without breaking the rules as a researcher. I was even able to help other students who were starting their journey. The creation of a social media platform by Prof Gumbo for his students is a good practice because it motivated me not to give up as I knew that I was not alone in the journey. Students on this platform share their challenges and assist each other where they can. I appreciate this initiative by Prof Gumbo because it yields positive results.

Doing quality work for the first time as I wrote a chapter was beneficial before submitting it to my supervisor because I did not have to start from the beginning spending too much time correcting areas that would have been attended to during the time when I was writing the first draft. This helped to lessen the burden of having too many technical mistakes to attend to after his input. In the process, I learnt that he is a perfectionist who wants his students to pay attention to minor details. He is strict with that.

I learnt that I can make my plans, but it is God who directs them (Proverbs 16:9). Unforeseen challenges of life can happen, and I should be able to withdraw without feeling guilty or that I am a failure, taking care of what is important at that time and continuing later. As a Christian, I have also seen Romans 8:28 come to pass in my life – that all things work together for the good.

The former President Mandela once said: "It seems impossible until it is done". I believe this because, as much as I was willing and determined to start the journey, there was a deep-seated fear within me whether I would make it. Now that I have come to the end of this journey, I can see that, indeed, it seems impossible until it is done. It is all

about overcoming the fear.

Finally, the findings of this study will assist to harness the tutorial support especially during these difficult times of COVID-19 pandemic. The findings will be most beneficial to the ITM institutional committee and to the regional staff members. They will have information of what students think about the ITM, the weaknesses of the model and how it can be improved to benefit the students especially those in remote and rural areas. The decision makers in different departments will be able to make research informed decisions regarding the ITM.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Focus group interview guide for students

Introduction of the focus group will include:
Welcome, overview of the topic, ground rules and first question

Good morning and welcome to our session! Thank you for taking your time to participate in this discussion about the tutorial support programmes offered to students by Unisa. My name is Smangele Ntuli from the Department of Student Support at Unisa. You were identified and invited to this discussion because of your participation in the tutorial model offered by Unisa and because of your familiarity with this model.

There are no wrong or right answers, but different perspectives are allowed on this issue.
Please feel free to ask any question or share your views as they are important for this discussion. Keep in mind that I do not only expect positive feedback, but negative feedback is also important for this discussion as it may assist to improve a lot of things in the model.

The discussion will be recorded in order not to miss any important information during this discussion. No names will be mentioned in the research report. Be assured of confidentiality. Be assured that your privacy will be protected. You also need to undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussion to any person outside the group to maintain confidentiality. All participants are expected to sign the consent form about their participation.

Let’s begin
My name is Smangele Ntuli. I come from Pretoria and am studying towards my doctoral degree at distance learning at Unisa.

1. Unisa provides tutorial support programme to its students through integrated tutor model (ITM). What is your understanding of this model?
2. How does this programme meet students' needs and expectations?
3. What do you expect from the ITM?
4. Would you say the ITM meet students' needs? Elaborate.
5. Unisa promises to provide quality tutorial support to students. Share your views about the quality measures that Unisa promises students in the ITM.
6. What is the impact of the implementation of the ITM on student access and participation at Unisa?
7. If you were given a chance to be in charge of the ITM, what would change in it, if any and why?
8. In your mind, is the ITM suited to serve African students? Motivate your answer.
9. If not, what changes can you suggest to make it suitable for African students?
10. What other crucial aspects should be evaluated in the ITM to ensure that students' needs are met?
11. Of all the things we have discussed, do you think we have missed out anything?

Thank you for your participation in this discussion.

## Appendix 2: Interview guide for tutors

**Section A: Biographical data**

1. How many years of tutoring do you have?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 years | 3-6 years | 6-10years | +10years |

2. College where your module/s is based

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CHS | CEDU | CAES | CSET | CEMS | CAS | CLAW |

3. How many modules do you tutor on face-to-face mode?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |

4. How many modules do you tutor online?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |

**Section B: Interview questions**

1. Unisa provides tutorial support to its students through integrated tutor model (ITM). Share your knowledge and understanding about this model.
2. Given your years of experience in the ITM, what are students' needs and expectations of this model?

3. Are students' needs and expectations met? Why?
4. In your experience as a tutor for these number of years, how do you ensure that you provide quality tutorial support to students?
5. What is the impact of the ITM to students with regards to access and participation?
6. What could be improved in the ITM to ensure that students' needs and expectations are met?
7. The African context in which you tutor differs from the European context, how can the ITM be improved to address the needs of African students?
8. Given your years of experience in this model of tutoring and interaction with students, lecturers and other administrative staff, what other crucial aspects of ITM could be evaluated in order to improve this model?

Thank you for your participation in this interview!

## Appendix 3: Interview guide for lecturers

**Section A: Biographical data**

1. How many years of lecturing do you have?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0-3 years | 3-6 years | 6-10years | +10years |

2. College where your module/s is based

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CHS | CEDU | CAES | CSET | CEMS | CAS | CLAW |

3. How many modules do you provide support for in an online platform?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |

4. How many modules do you provide support for on face-to-face programme?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |

**Section B: Interview questions**

1. Unisa provides tutorial support to its students through integrated tutor model (ITM). Share your experience about this model.
2. Given your years of experience in lecturing, what are students' needs and expectations of the ITM?
3. Are students' needs and expectations met? why?
4. In your experience as a lecturer for these number of years, how do you ensure quality support in ITM?
5. What is the impact of the ITM to students with regards to access and participation?
6. What could be improved in the ITM to ensure that students' needs and expectations are met?
7. The African context in which you teach differs from the European context, how can ITM be improved to address the needs of African students?
8. Given your years of lecturing experience in through the ITM, your interaction with students, tutors and other administrative staff, what other crucial aspects could be evaluated to improve this model?

Thank you for your participation!

## Appendix 4: Interview guide for college administrators

**Section A: Biographical data**

1. How many years have you been involved in the administration of this programme?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 years | 3-6 years | 6-10years | +10years |

2. Which college/s are you involved with?

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CHS | CEDU | CAES | CSET | CEMS | CAS | CLAW |

**Section B: Interview questions**

1. Unisa provides tutorial support to its students through integrated tutor model (ITM). Share your knowledge and understanding about this model.

2. Given your years of experience in the administration of ITM, what would you say are students' needs and expectations of this model?

3. Do you think students' needs and expectations are met? why?

4. In your experience as Academic Support Coordinator (ASC), how do you ensure quality tutorial administration for ITM?

5. ASCs are expected to monitor the access and participation of students in the ITM, what is the impact of the ITM to students with regards to access and participation to this model?

6. What could be improved in the ITM administration to ensure that students' needs and expectations are met?

7. The ITM offered at Unisa is within an African context which differs from the European context, how can Unisa improve the administration of this model to address the needs of African students?

8. Given your years of administrative experience in ITM and interaction with students, lecturers and other administrative staff, what other crucial aspects could be evaluated to improve this model?

Thank you for your participation!

## Appendix 5: Individual interview guides for regional staff

**Section A: Biographical data**

1. How many years have you been involved in the administration of this model?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 years | 3-6 years | 6-10years | +10years |

2. Which colleges are you involved with?

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CHS | CEDU | CAES | CSET | CEMS | CAS | CLAW |

**Section B: Interview questions**

1. Unisa provides tutorial support to its students through integrated tutor model (ITM). Share your knowledge and understanding about model.

2. Given your years of experience in the administration of ITM what would you say are students' needs and expectations of this model?

3. Do you think students' needs and expectations are met? Why?

4. In your experience as administrator, how do you ensure quality tutorial administration for ITM?

5. What is the impact of the ITM to students with regards to access and participation to ITM? Share your views from the administrative perspective?

6. What could be improved in the ITM administration to ensure that students' needs and expectations are met?

7. The ITM offered at Unisa is within an African context which differs from the European context, how can Unisa improve the administration of this model in order to address the needs of African students?

8. Given your years of administrative experience in ITM and interaction with students, lecturers and other administrative staff, what other crucial aspects of ITM could be evaluated in order to improve?

Thank you for your participation!

## Appendix 6: Students questionnaire

My name is Smangele Ntuli and I am conducting a research on the effectiveness of the integrated tutor model (ITM) in distance learning. I am interested in knowing how effectively ITM meets your needs and expectations during your study at Unisa. Please note that there is no right or wrong answer. All the information provided will be treated confidentially.

Please complete the questionnaire by responding to all the questions/statements in the spaces provided.

- **In Section A,** you are required to mark the appropriate box with an X
- **In Section B to Section G,** you are required to respond by stating the level of your agreement or disagreement with the statements provided.
- **In Section H,** you are required to write down your opinion regarding the question asked.

**Section A: Biographical information**

Mark the appropriate box with X

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Gender | Male | | | | | | Female | | | |
| 2 | Age Range | 19 | 20 -25 | 26 -30 | 31-40 | | | 41-50 | Above 50 | | |
| 3 | Race | African | | White | Coloured | | | Indian | Other | | |
| 4 | Region where you are based | Gauteng | | Midlands | KZN | | | Western Cape | Eastern Cape | | Limpopo |
| 5 | In which academic year are you in? | 1st year | | 2nd year | | | | 3rd year | | | 4th year |
| 6 | In which college is your qualification? | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | My online learning experience is | Excellent | | Good | | | | Poor | | | Very poor |

Answer the following questions under Sections B to G by stating whether you:

**STRONGLY AGREE = 5**

**AGREE = 4**

**PARTIALLY AGREE = 3**

**DISAGREE = 2**

**STRONGLY DISAGREE = 1**

Only put a tick (√) on the answer you think is the appropriate one. There are no wrong or correct answers. Be honest in answering these questions.

**Section B: Students' needs**

| No | Item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I need to be supported through face-to-face tutorials | | | | | |
| 2 | I need to be supported through online tutorials | | | | | |
| 3 | I need to be supported through face-to-face tutorials and online tutorials | | | | | |
| 4 | I need to be introduced to what Unisa expects from me as distant learner | | | | | |
| 5 | I need to be part of the university community and interact with other students | | | | | |
| 6 | I need to be encouraged and motivated in my journey at the University | | | | | |
| 7 | I need to access all resources that will help me to succeed. | | | | | |
| 8 | I need to meet with other students face-to-face and online for support purposes. | | | | | |
| 9 | I need to understand the benefits of participating online and face-to-face tutorials | | | | | |
| 10 | I need the tutor to understand my challenges as a distance learner. | | | | | |

**Section C: Students' expectations**

| No | Item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | I expect the tutors to teach me the content of modules | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | I expect to be guided on how to answer assignments | | | | | |
| 13 | I expect the tutors to guide me to do my assignments | | | | | |
| 14 | I expect to get guidance from the module tutors whenever I need it | | | | | |
| 15 | I expect my tutors to go through the previous question papers with me when I prepare for the examinations | | | | | |
| 16 | I expect the administrative staff at Unisa to be polite and provide assistance when needed | | | | | |
| 17 | I expect the tutors to set ground rules and resolve conflicts in tutorial classes online and face-to-face | | | | | |
| 18 | I expect the tutors to prepare before the tutorial classes | | | | | |
| 19 | I expect the tutors to assist with technical challenges when needed | | | | | |
| 20 | The role of tutors is clearly defined and I know what my role is as a student at Unisa | | | | | |
| 21 | I expect the tutor to communicate frequently with me in order to update me on what is expected of me. | | | | | |

**Section D: Quality of the ITM as perceived by students**

| **No** | **Item** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 22 | Unisa provides tutorial classes as promised | | | | | |
| 23 | Tutors are available to respond to students' queries whenever they need help | | | | | |
| 24 | Attending tutorials helps me to understand the module content | | | | | |
| 25 | My tutors provide assistance and guidance on assignments | | | | | |
| 26 | I receive quality learning experience in each tutorial session | | | | | |
| 27 | I receive clear feedback that identifies areas of | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | improvement from my tutors | | | | | |
| 28 | When the tutor does not know anything about my questions she/he refers me to a specialist within the University. | | | | | |
| 29 | Staff members in the regional centres are helpful to students with accessing their e-tutors. | | | | | |
| 30 | The tutorial centre communicates any changes to the tutorial schedule or time-table | | | | | |
| 31 | The tutor knows the content very well | | | | | |
| 32 | The quality of tutorials respond to my needs and expectations | | | | | |
| 33 | Tutorials assist me to be independent in my learning journey | | | | | |
| 34 | The regional tutorial centres plan tutorial quite well | | | | | |

**Section E: Impact of the implementation of the ITM on student access and participation at Unisa?**

| | | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 35 | Internet is always available for students to connect to MyUnisa/MyModules. | | | | | |
| 36 | I only participate in online tutorials | | | | | |
| 37 | I only participate in face-to-face tutorials | | | | | |
| 38 | I have access to computers in the regional computer laboratory | | | | | |
| 39 | I access the e-tutor platform and ask my tutor questions | | | | | |
| 40 | I access the online tutorial platform and interact with other students studying the same module as me | | | | | |
| 41 | I am involved in teamwork and assist other students who are struggling | | | | | |
| 42 | The tutorial staff provides me with a positive learning | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | experience in the regional centre where I am based | | | | | |
| 43 | The tutors' presence assists me to participate online | | | | | |
| 44 | The ITM is inclusive and accessible to all students including those in remote areas | | | | | |
| 45 | My tutor has a caring spirit and encourages students to exchange information in an online platform | | | | | |
| 46 | My tutor leads discussion forums online and encourages participation. | | | | | |

**Section F: How could ITM be Africanised to address the needs of African students?**

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 47 | The design of tutor support accommodates the background of the majority of students | | | | | |
| 48 | The tutors employed by Unisa understand the background and context of African students | | | | | |
| 49 | During a tutorial class, students are given opportunities to contribute their African perspectives | | | | | |
| 50 | Unisa tutor model is designed in a way that provides access without geographical barriers that separate a tutor from the student | | | | | |
| 51 | Access to technology enables me to participate in the ITM | | | | | |
| 52 | The location of the tutorial centre requires me to use transport to attend tutorials | | | | | |
| 53 | The centre assists to acquire computer skills which enable me to participate online with ease | | | | | |
| 54 | The regional learning centre I use has all the equipment and resources I need to help me succeed | | | | | |
| 55 | The language of teaching and learning in tutorial classes | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | is English, however, the tutors code-switch to African languages to clarify certain concepts | | | | | |
| 56 | Online tutor support assists students with poor schooling background | | | | | |
| 57 | The tutor model is inclusive to all students coming from different contexts and schooling backgrounds | | | | | |

**Section G: What could be evaluated in the tutor model to help meet the needs of students?**

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 58 | Face-to-face tutors | | | | | |
| 59 | Online tutors | | | | | |
| 60 | Student discussion forums | | | | | |
| 61 | Interaction of tutors with students | | | | | |
| 62 | Students' access to resources | | | | | |

**Section H: How can the current ITM be improved to fully cater for Unisa students' needs and expectations?**

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

Thank you for your participation

## Appendix 7: Request for permission to conduct research

PO BOX 39
Wingate Park
Pretoria
0153
12 April 2019

College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee
PO BOX 392
Unisa
0003

**RE: Request for permission to conduct research at Unisa**

Dear Sir/Madam

I, Mrs CHS Ntuli, am doing research under the supervision of Professor M.T. Gumbo towards a doctoral degree at the University of South Africa. I hereby request permission to conduct a research study at six Unisa regional service centres. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the integrated tutor model. The completed research will be submitted as part of my doctoral thesis. Participants' identity shall be protected and participation shall be voluntary, and confidentiality shall be ensured at all times during the process of the research.

Data will be collected within a time frame of two months. Participants' withdrawal without refusal will be accepted with no reservation. Three tutors, three lecturers, three tutorial officers, three regional academic coordinators, three academic support coordinators, three human resource officers, two heads of facilitation of learning and four students will be interviewed individually. Focus group interviews will be held with six groups of students. All interviews will be recorded. Questionnaires will also be distributed to students who will be requested to respond online. Document analysis will

be conducted, hence, the researcher will request access to some documents relevant for the study.

The benefits of this study are that the regions will have an opportunity to identify gaps in the integrated tutor model and provide possible solutions to the problems experienced by students and staff in the implementation of the tutor model. Colleges will have an opportunity to provide feedback on how the ITM responds to the needs and expectations of students and identify gaps that could be addressed by the study. To ensure that work and study are not interrupted, the researcher will schedule interviews during lunch hour breaks or at a time the participants deem fit. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research. Feedback procedure will entail providing a link to the Unisa repository to the participants should they need to access the findings of the research.

For more information, kindly contact my supervisor at the University of South Africa at gumbomt@unisa.ac.za, tel: 012 429 3339.

Yours sincerely

_____ Signature

_____ Mrs CHS Ntuli

_____ Head: Facilitation of Learning

## Appendix 8: Participant information sheet for student

University of South Africa
P. O. Box 392
UNISA
0003
11 April 2019

**Dear Student**

My name is Ms CHS Ntuli and I am doing research towards a doctoral degree at the University of South Africa under the supervision of Professor MT Gumbo. I invite you to participate in a study entitled, *An evaluation of the effectiveness of the integrated tutor model in Distance Learning: A case of Unisa*.

This study is expected to collect important information that could assist to improve the integrated tutor model used at Unisa to support students. You are invited because you are involved in the ITM your study space and would assist with the information needed to ensure that this research is a success. I obtained your contact details from the Unisa student system. There are 2000 other students who will participate in this study.

Data will be collected through individual interviews, focus groups interviews, questionnaire distribution and audio recording during interviews. Questionnaires that will be distributed to students is estimated to be completed within 25 to 30 minutes Individual interviews and focus groups interviews will take between 45-60 minutes. Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Please take note that once you have submitted your questionnaire it will not be possible to withdraw it.

Your participation will benefit you and other students since you will share your experiences in using the integrated tutor model and how best the challenges identified could be addressed by the University. Your participation will also benefit the University because it will be able to improve the ITM processes and procedures in assisting to meet the needs and expectations of Unisa students.

Kindly note that there are no foreseeable risks of harm or side-effects to students participating in this study. The only inconvenience that could be experienced is the fact that you will need to take your study time and respond to the questionnaire, participate in the focus groups or individual interviews. Please note that prior to the interviews taking place, you will be informed well in advance regarding the date, time, place and duration of the interviews in order to assist you to plan your time for the day.

You have the right to insist that your name not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research or your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a code or a pseudo name and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

After the interviews have been conducted and data collected, there will be no other person who will have access to data except the researcher. However, you should know that your information may be used for other purposes other than this particular study, such as research articles and conference papers. The data could be included in research reports, journal articles and conference proceedings. Even though your information will be used in these documents, you will not be mentioned in any of these in order to protect your identity. Please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality or anonymity, e.g. when focus groups are used as a data collection method.

While I will make every effort to ensure that you will not be connected to the information that you share during the focus group, I cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will treat information confidentially. I shall, however, encourage all participants to do so. For this reason I advise you not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group. Focus group is a group of people gathered in one place with a purpose of discussing a topic or give feedback about a certain topic of interest.

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet in Gauteng Region for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored in the Unisa Enterprise Content Management System in a personal folder which can be accessed through a password only. The future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After five years, the information will be destroyed by shredding it and recorded information will be permanently deleted from the folder used to store the recorded data.

Participants will not receive any payment or reward, financial or otherwise for participating in this research. When you participate, it is strictly on a voluntary basis.

**This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the (identify the relevant ERC), Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.**

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact **Mrs CHS Ntuli on (012) 441 5751 or 082 8011 996 or email at ntulichs@unisa.ac.za** or website http://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/6418. The findings are accessible for **public viewing from the end of November 2020**. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact **Mrs CHS Ntuli on (012) 441 5751 or 082 8011 996 or email at ntulichs@unisa.ac.za**

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact **Prof M.T. Gumbo at 012 429 3339, email address gumbomt@unisa.ac.za**

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Sign_____

**Mrs CHS Ntuli**

## Appendix 9: Participant information sheet for staff members

University of South Africa
P. O. Box 392
UNISA 0003
11 April 2019

Dear Staff member

My name is Ms CHS Ntuli and I am doing research towards a doctoral degree at the University of South Africa under the supervision of Professor M.T. Gumbo. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled *An evaluation of the effectiveness of the integrated tutor model in Distance Learning: A case of Unisa*.

This study is expected to collect important information that could assist to improve the integrated tutor model used at Unisa to support students. You are invited because you are involved in the implementation of the ITM on a daily basis in your work space and would assist with the information needed to ensure the success of this research. I obtained your contact details from the regional directory. There are three other regional staff members at your level who will participate in this study.

Data will be collected through individual interviews, focus groups interviews, questionnaire and audio recording during interviews. Questionnaires that will be distributed to students are estimated to be completed within 25 to 30 minutes. Individual interviews and focus groups interviews will take between 45 and 60 minutes.

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Please take note that once you have submitted your questionnaire it will not be possible to withdraw it.

Your presence will benefit you and students since you will share your experiences in

using the integrated tutor model and how best the challenges identified could be addressed by the University. Your participation will also benefit the University because it will help to improve the ITM processes and procedures in assisting to meet the needs and expectations of Unisa students.

Kindly note that there are no foreseeable risks of harm or side effects to the staff participating in this study. The only inconvenience that could be experienced is the fact that you will need to take your office or lunch time and participate in the individual interviews. Please note that prior to the interviews taking place, you will be informed well in advance regarding the date, time, place and duration of the interviews to assist you to plan your time for the day.

You have the right to insist that your name not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research or your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

After the interviews have been conducted and data collected, there will be no other person who will have access to data except the researcher. However, you should know that your information could be used for other purposes other than this particular study. The data could be included in research reports, journal articles and conference proceedings. Even though your information will be used in these documents, you will not be mentioned in any of these in order to protect your identity. Please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality or anonymity.

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet in Gauteng Region for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored in the Unisa Enterprise Content Management System in a personal folder which could only be accessed through a

password. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After five years, the information you provided will be destroyed by shredding it and recorded information will be permanently deleted from the folder used to store the recorded data.

Participants will not receive any payment or reward, financial or otherwise for participating in this research. When you participate, it is strictly on a voluntary basis.

**This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the (identify the relevant ERC), Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.**

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact **Mrs CHS Ntuli on (012) 441 5751 or 082 8011 996 or email at ntulichs@unisa.ac.za** or website http://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/6418 The findings are accessible for **public viewing from end of November 2020**. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact **Mrs CHS Ntuli on (012) 441 5751 or 082 8011 996 or email at ntulichs@unisa.ac.za**

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact **Prof MT Gumbo at 012 429 3339, email address gumbomt@unisa.ac.za**

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Sign_____

**Mrs CHS Ntuli**

## Appendix 10: Focus groups consent return slip

### Focus group consent and confidentiality agreement

I,_____ grant consent that the information I share during the focus group may be used by **Mrs CHS Ntuli** for research purposes. I am aware that the group discussions will be digitally recorded and grant consent for these recordings, provided that my privacy will be protected. I undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality.

Participant's Name (Please print): _____
Participant Signature: _____
Researcher's Name: (Please print): **Ms CHS Ntuli**
Researcher's Signature: _____
Date: _____

## Appendix 11: Individual interviews consent and confidentiality agreement

I,_____ grant consent that the information I share during the interview may be used by **Mrs CHS Ntuli** for research purposes. I am aware that the interview will be digitally recorded and grant consent for these recordings, provided that my privacy will be protected. I undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the interview to any person outside the interview in order to maintain confidentiality.

Participant's Name (Please print): _____
Participant Signature: _____
Researcher's Name: (Please print): **Ms CHS Ntuli**
Researcher's Signature: _____
Date: _____

## Appendix 12: Research ethics clearance certificate

UNISA university of south africa

**UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE**

Date: 2019/05/15

Ref: **2019/05/15/6642152/15/MC**
Name: Mrs CHS Ntuli
Student: 6642152

Dear Mrs Ntuli

**Decision:** Ethics Approval from 2019/05/15 to 2024/05/15

**Researcher(s):** Name: Mrs CHS Ntuli
E-mail address: ntulichs@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: +27 82 801 1996

**Supervisor(s):** Name: Prof MT Gumbo
E-mail address: gumbomt@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: +27 12 429 3339

**Title of research:**

**An evaluation of the effectiveness of the integrated tutor model in distance learning: A case of Unisa**

**Qualification:** D. Ed in Student Support

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2019/05/15 to 2024/05/15.

*The **low risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2019/05/15 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

Open Rubric

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2024/05/17**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

*Note:*

*The reference number* **2019/05/15/6642152/15/MC** *should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,

**Prof AT Motlhabane**
**CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC**
motlhat@unisa.ac.za

**Prof PM Sebate**
**ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN**
Sebatpm@unisa.ac.za



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## Appendix 13: Example 1 of Individual Interview

**Example 1 of the semi-structured interview session**

**Name of the recorder:** LT160000

**Interview mode:** Face-to-face interview

**Length of the audio:** 32min. 24 sec

**Date of the interview:** 21 January 2020

**Transcription legend:** Researcher

Participant

**Researcher:** Good Morning Colleague

**Participant:** Morning Sister Mangi oh because this is a formal session ha- ha- ha- (laughing) I should call you Mrs Ntuli.

**Researcher:** No problem with that. Call me Mrs Ntuli. Thank you for taking your time to participate in this discussion about the tutorial support programme offered by Unisa. My name is Mrs Smangele Ntuli from the Department of Student Support at Unisa. I come from Pretoria and I am studying towards my doctoral degree in distance learning at Unisa.

You were identified and invited to this discussion because of your participation to tutorial model offered by Unisa and because of your familiarity with this model.

I would like to emphasise that there are no wrong or right answers but different perspective on the issue at hand. Please feel free to ask any question or share your views as they are important for this discussion. Keep in mind that I do not only expect positive feedback, but negative feedback is also important for this discussion as it may assist to improve a lot of things in the programme.

The discussion will be recorded in order to assist not to miss any important information during this session. No names will be mentioned in the report. Be assured of confidentiality. Be assured that your privacy will be protected. You also need to undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality. Please sign this consent form to undertake issue of confidentiality.

Before we can begin, is there anything you want to ask or say? In the absence of no question or comment let us begin.

**Participant:** Not exactly, I think we can begin.

**Researcher: How many years have you been involved in the administration of this model?**

***Participant****: Actually I have been at Unisa from the first of 1 June 2010 and I will be 10 years as a lecturer and I was recruited to start the (xxxx) department. I am the first lecturer to be recruited in this department in 2010 I remember in my first year I was given 4 modules, 2 for undergraduate and 2 for postgraduate. Postgraduate were the honours modules.*

*Researcher: Do you have any modules that you are providing support online?*

***Participant:*** *Mmmmm, When I started in 2010, actually we were introduced to MyUnisa Learning management where is group discussion forum where students-student and student-teacher interaction. After being introduced to the Unisa Learning Management we then started to support students using the so called video conferencing to reach out to students.*

***Researcher:*** *But fully online support are, you involved in that or do you have tutors that you work with online to support students?*

*When I started we never had tutors operating on the LMS but now off late, things have changed and all the higher certificate modules are linked to online tutorship and we as lecturers we support our tutors operating on MyUnisa LMS. We try to reach out to tutors who are responsible for (xxx) modules.*

**Researcher: Which colleges are you involved**

***Participan****t: I am involved with the college of (xxxx)*

**Researcher:** Unisa provides tutorial support to its students through integrated tutor model (ITM). Share your knowledge and understanding about model? What is your experience in ITM

**Participant:** *My experience in this ITM is twofold firstly it breaks the transactional distance between the lecturers and tutors because in an online mode lecturers are able to reach out to the tutors that are scattered all over the provinces of South Africa. We are able to improve the throughput rate of particular module because there is an interaction between the tutors and lecturers we have little dropout rates in the Higher certificate modules our pass percentage are very high and this could be attributed to the support that we have with the tutors.*

**Researcher:** Are students' needs and expectations met? elaborate

**Participant:** *Students need tutors to respond to their queries and one can see how much they appreciate if a tutor or lecturer responds quickly. Some of our students are 1st generation of distance learning and majority of them do not have knowledge and how DE work. They are expecting tutor and lecturers to be with them most of the time and it doesn't work like that. After getting into contact with them they appreciate what we are doing with them. They are expecting to be in the classroom where they expect to be taught. Once they interact with us their perception of Unisa changes because they realise that Unisa is not what they expected to be.*

***Researcher:*** *do you think ITM is meeting students' needs and expectations?*

***Participant:*** *The number of registration in (XXXX College) tells us that we are meeting expectations because registration increases. However in the tutor support space we somehow not meeting their expectations because we still have a gap between lecturers and the tutors who are not interacting. Tutors are a middle man between a lecture and students. So support will always be lacking if there is not interaction or relationship between tutors and lecturers and this is not good for our student.*

**Researcher:** In your experience as administrator, how do you ensure quality tutorial administration for ITM?

**Participant:** *When I write tutorial letter 101 I share it with my external marker and the tutor in order for them to identify the gaps and ensure quality. College of education has a quality committee that before any material goes out is quality assured. I try by all means to get feedback from students and tutors after certain sessions online. And face-to-face engagement with students I distribute a questionnaire* so that *they evaluate me after my presentation. Tutors also give us feedback from the students.*

**Researcher**: What is the impact of the ITM to students with regards to access and participation to ITM? Share your views from the administrative perspective?

**Participant:** *Regarding access, Unisa have internet connectivity in the centres all over the country and students do have access. Students register but do not attend tutorial classes. We need to find out what could be the problem in attending classes. The campuses are accessible to our students in the regional campuses. We have satellite campuses e.g. Makhado and Giyani in the North Eastern campus where students are able to reach these places.*

*When it comes to participation, every student who does Higher Certificate do the compulsory module and this module is fully online. Students are assigned etutors, lecturers are just overseers and we are able to see what is happening online and the responses we get are positive. We are standing at more than 80% passrate in this module since it was previously 50%. Students get mark from the activity that they discuss and critique online. And in the final exam mark it weigh about 5-10% which contributes to their success.*

**Researcher:** Wow quite impressive results.

**Participant:** *Thank you, we are trying hard to support students in our department*

**Researcher**: The ITM offered at Unisa is within an African context which differs from the European context, how can Unisa improve the administration of this model in order to address the needs of African students?

**Participant:** *As I said initially when we started our session, some students are 1st generation of distance learning and majority of them do not have knowledge and how DE work. They are expecting tutor and lecturers to be with them most of the time and it doesn't work like that. Students are given orientations in order to provide information about the module they have enrolled for. We are operating in the 4th industrial revolution, we also develop a profile of our students that tell us as to how we should support them, and from this profile we find that students do have cellphones and connectivity especially in the rural areas. The stage has already been set, we do not have a lot of burden but we encourage our student to be involved and motivate them to come on board.*

**Researcher**: What could be improved in the ITM to ensure that students' needs and expectations are met?

**Participant:** *Communicate more with students and support them since this is what they need most. Support. I would like to see improved technologies to gain speed; improve the communication with tutors, students and improve our quality assurance systems and get feedback more and more from students so that we are able to improve our systems as informed by students.*

**Researcher**: My last question to you is, given your years of lecturing experience through the ITM, your interaction with students, tutors and other administrative staff, what other crucial aspects could be evaluated in order to improve this model?

**Participant***:* Let's evaluate the MyUnisa Learning management so that when we logon it doesn't decline the credentials.

**Researcher:** We have now come to the end of the interview, however before we close it, is there anything that you would like to add?

**Participant:** *there is nothing I can think of right now. I will email should I think of something.*

**Researcher:** I would like to take this time and thank you for agreeing to meet with me and provide such valuable information. Thank you

**Participant:** *Thank you Ma'am anytime.*

**END OF RECORDING**

## Appendix 14: Example 2 of Individual Interview

### Example 2 of the semi-structured interview session for individual interviews

**Name of the recorder:** Galaxy S5

**Interview mode:** Microsoft teams interview

**Length of the audio:** 38min.24sec

**Date of the interview:** 18 March 2020

**Transcription legend:** Researcher

Participant

**Researcher:** Good Morning Madam.

**Participant:** Morning Mangi

**Researcher:** Thank you for taking your time to participate in this discussion about the tutorial support programmes offered by Unisa. I meant to come to your centre but due to the travel restrictions posed by COVID19 I decided to use this technologies to meet with you. My name is Mrs Smangele Ntuli from the Department of Student Support at Unisa. I come from Pretoria and I am studying towards my doctoral degree in distance learning at Unisa.

You may ask out of all the regions why was I requested to participate in the study? Colleague you were identified and invited to this discussion because your participation to tutorial model offered by Unisa and because of your familiarity with this model.

I would like to emphasise that there are no wrong or right answers but different perspective on the issue at hand. Please feel free to ask any question or share your views as they are important for this discussion. Keep in mind that I do not only expect positive feedback, but negative feedback is also important for this discussion as it may assist to improve a lot of things in the programme.

The discussion will be recorded in order to assist not to miss any important information during this session. No names will be mentioned in the report. Be assured of confidentiality. Be assured that your privacy will be protected. You also need to undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality. Thank you for signing the form and sending it back to me. I appreciate.

Before we can begin, is there anything you want to ask or say? In the absence of no question or comment let us begin.

**Participant:** No Mangi there is nothing, I think everything is clear.

**Researcher:** How many years have you been involved in the administration of this model?

***Participan****t: Wuuu Mangi, let me see. It's quite some time now. I have been in the region for more than 10 of years now Mangi.*

***Researcher:*** *Have you been in the Eastern Cape all these years?*

***Participant:*** *Yes ii have been in the Eastern Cape. I have been operating as a (name of the position) and I think it was in 2019 when I was seconded to a (xxx) position in the region.*

***Researcher:*** *wow, congratulations on your secondment.*

***Participant:*** *The union and the management recognised me that I have been running the office on my own for many years hence this recognition.*

**Researcher: Ok sisi.** Thank you for sharing the good news with me. Going back to the core of the session. Which colleges are you involved with?

***Participan****t: I administer all colleges for face-to-face tutor support.*

**Researcher:** Unisa provides tutorial support to its students through integrated tutor model (ITM). Share your knowledge and understanding about model?

**Participant:** In my understanding the ITM was established by the institution to try and bridge the gap. I can also say that this *is the tutorial programme and the purpose of the model is to try and increase the throughput rate at Unisa. How it works, tutors are being appointed by the colleges, the regions help with the recruitment of tutors and send their documents to the colleges to appoint. The marketing of the programme is also done in the regions.*

**Researcher:** Alright, my next question is, given the years that you have in the administration of tutor support. What are the needs and expectations of students? Do you think students' needs and expectations are met by this programme? Why?

**Participant:** let me say students need to get support and they think they are going to attend lectures. Number two is that they expect tutors to support them in their studies. The word facilitation is the word that doesn't want to dwell in their minds. They don't come prepared for the class to ask questions to the tutor**.**

**Researcher:** are you saying they do not prepare for a tutorial? What then the tutor does if students are not prepared? Does he/she meet their needs?

**Participant:** *Somehow students' needs are met. This is evident in the tutorial attendance where students consistently attend the tutorials and when exam results of the centre are analysed students passed those modules they have been attending consistently.*

*Students expect tutors to support them in their studies, as I said they also expect that they will get lecturers to teach them. The word facilitation is a something that does not want to get into their minds because when they are in the class the tutor should be able to use everything to help them. They do not prepare so that the tutorial can be useful for them.*

**Researcher:** In your experience as administrator, how do you ensure quality tutorial administration for ITM?

**Participant:** *for as long as I remember since sis Thandi's era tutors are given tools for facilitation and provision of all other additional tools needed for them to be able to facilitate with quality. Tutor evaluations*

*are done and should there be any gap, tutor training takes place. sms system is utilised to ensure that the content of communication is correct e.g. tutorial cancellation and commencement of a tutorial classes. Function 910 is very good and I commend the initiators of the function. In addition to this function, sms should be used, include the RAC and the tutor herself to know what information was sent to students regarding the classes. Putting the schedule in the website and also display the schedule on the notice boards.*

*Regions need support of the stakeholders like academics and the approach is essential because if they are approached in a right manner they helpful. Tutors are requested to copy the administrator whenever they communicate with academics. Tutor work plan is also submitted to the Regional Academic Coordinator.*

**Researcher**: What is the impact of the ITM to students with regards to access and participation to ITM? Share your views from the administrative perspective?

**Participant:** *alright let me start by online modules: Some students who are doing online modules do not have computer literacy skills as a result the centre provides them with computer training so that they are able to engage online with the modules. Remember most of the students here stay in the bundus and they are still blind when it comes to technology.*

*Wifi and internet are a problem and this is beyond our control as we depend on the ICT at Unisa. We teach our students not to wait until the last minute but try to do the work as soon as they can in order for them to submit on time or before the due date.*

*We open till late to support those students who must engage online with their tutors, we open at 8h00 and close at 19h00 during the week and on Saturdays we open at 8h00 and close at 16h00. To help students have access to their online tutorials and engage with other students and, their material and tutors.*

*In some modules students attend quite well. Students are not preparing for the class and this is another cause of non-participation to the tutorial class.*

**Researcher:** *why are students not attending?*

**Participant:** *students do not attend because some are bored by the tutor, others cannot afford to come to the centre always, and others I don't know.*

**Researcher**: The ITM offered at Unisa is within an African context which differs from the European context, how can Unisa improve the administration of this model in order to address the needs of African students?

**Participant:** Our students come from disadvantaged communities and their level of participation and understanding as compared to those in urban areas is far low. It take them sometime for them to understand how Unisa is operating. The ITM does not address the problem however it exasperate it because for them it is for the first time they engage with the computer at a university level and this frustrates them.

The university needs to ask at the registration and application if they computer literate. On the entry level they need to be assessed their computer skills. Some are even not confident in touching the mouse.

**Researcher**: What could be improved in the ITM administration to ensure that students' needs and expectations are met?

**Participant:** we must improve the working relationship between tutors and module lecturers to support our tutors because they need them they are desperate for their support.

**Researcher**: My last question to you is, given your years of administrative experience in ITM and interaction with students, lecturers and other administrative staff, what other crucial aspects of ITM could be evaluated in order to improve?

**Participant: we should evaluate the if we have qualified tutors, s**upport from the academics in terms meetings that should be held at the beginning of each semester, feedback from the academics and the use of whatsapp group to improve our communication.

**Researcher:** we have now come to the end of the interview, however before we close it, Is there anything that you would like to add?

**Participant:** nothing just to thank you for asking me to participate in this session.

**Researcher:** I would like to take this time and thank you for agreeing to meet with me and provide such valuable information. I value your inputs very much. Thank you

**Participant:** *Thank you Mangi*

**END OF RECORDING**

## Appendix 15: Example 1 of Focus Group Interview

**Example 1 of the semi-structured interview session for focus groups**

**Focus group 8**

**Name of the recorder:** Galaxy S5

**Length of the audio:** 60min.24sec

**Date of the interview:** 17 September 2019

**Transcription legend:** Researcher

Good afternoon and welcome to the session. Thank you for taking your time to come and participate in this discussion about the tutorial support programmes offered by Unisa. My name is Mrs Smangele Ntuli from the Department of Student Support at Unisa. I come from Pretoria and I am studying towards my doctoral degree in distance learning at Unisa.

You were identified and invited to this discussion because your participation to tutorial model offered by Unisa and because of your familiarity with this model.

I would like to emphasise that there are no wrong or right answers but different perspective on the issue at hand. Please feel free to ask any question or share your views as they are important for this discussion. Keep in mind that I do not only expect positive feedback, but negative feedback is also important for this discussion as it may assist to improve a lot of things in the programme.

The discussion will be recorded in order to assist not to miss any important information during this session. No names will be mentioned in the report. Be assured of confidentiality. Be assured that your privacy will be protected. You also need to undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality. All participants are expected to sign the consent form to undertake issue of confidentiality.

Before we can begin, is there anything you want clarity on? In the absence of no question let us begin. My first question to you is:-

**1. Researcher:** Unisa provides tutorial support programme to its students through integrated tutor model (ITM). What is your understanding of this model?

**Participant:** This is the model that assist us and prepare us for examination.

**Participant:** A model that assist students to meet and assist one another with content, assignments, interact with other students. It includes face to face classes and video calls.

**Participant:** it's a model that aims to open us on the understanding of the content and prepare us for examinations and assignment, the interaction we have with students is helpful.

**2. Researcher:** What do you expect and need from the ITM? Let's start with the expectations.

**Participant:** We expect tutors who will help us with our assignments and guiding us to prepare for examination. When that was not done I decided that I will not attend face to face tutorials anymore.

**Participant:** Mmmmm, *I expect to be taught the content and receive the best content because I chose Unisa for a reason.*

**Participant:** *I expect tutors to deal with the content that is in our assignments and examinations.*

**Participant:** Ok, I expect Unisa tutors to help me to pass my modules because I pay for myself I do not have a bursary, if I fail it means that I have to hustle to get money for fees.

**Participant:** *I don't have any expectations from Unisa but I know that I have do to most of the work by myself and not to rely on a tutor even though I attend face to face tutorials which are very helpful to me.*

**Participant:** *for me, let me see, I expect to get information and clarity on content of the modules I enrolled for*.

**Researcher:** Thank you, then let's move to the needs, what are your needs from the ITM?

**Participant:** *We need tutors to be there for us to help us with assignments instead they tell us that they are only available at certain times. Some of us fail because they were never there to respond to our queries".*

**Participant:** *Some of us fail because they were never there to respond to our queries.*

**Participant:** *I need the tutor to respond to my questions online, it takes days and weeks and this discourage us to engage online.*

**Participant:** *The tutor provide guidance during face-to-face tutorials when students attend classes this mode has few problems.* To help us with what we are struggling with.

**Participant:** We need tutors to provide more information and elaborate on the answer provided by other students online. She must not leave everything to students.

**Participant:** We need the tutor programme be well marketed to students so that we know exactly how the programme will assist us.

**Participant:** We need computer training workshops to be provided earlier in order for us to get skills on how to use a computer.

**Participant:** I need tutors to give the best so that I can give the best too.

**Researcher:** Any other input before we move to the next question.

**Participants:** nodding their heads saying no more inputs

**3. Researcher**: Would you say the ITM meet students' needs and expectations? Elaborate.

**Participant:** Yes and no I will tell you why MaNtuli. In terms of needs yes because most tutors do their work. No because they do not respond to our questions on time. Some do respond and indicate that they will respond after 2 or 3 days and this is the good part of the model.

**Participant:** Students should also take responsibility and read but not leave everything to the tutor.

**Participant:** There are no tutors for the modules we are studying so hence I say it is not meeting the needs and our expectations.

**Participant:** We do have online tutors however what is the barrier for me is that I do not have Wi-Fi at home. I need training on how to navigate online since I am doing an online module as a result I do not

engage in online discussions. I always get a message to attend the class but when I come there is nothing, no one has a solid answer for me.

**Participants:** Online tutors do not interact with us regularly they just ask questions and guide us about if assignments are late what procedure we must follow.

**4. Researcher:** Unisa promises to provide quality tutorial support to students. Share your views about the quality measures that Unisa promises students in the ITM.

***Participant****: The online tutors should ensure that they post quality content to assist students. Some tutors post old information. For instance, a tutor posted content that he posted last year in exact wording nothing changed and this made me to doubt her and I ended up not interacting because I lost faith in her.*

**Participant:** They don't post questions on assignment 1 and just focus on assignment 2 and give guidelines on how to respond to question 2. We were stressed with the strike going on at the university too. I had to stay up till 2am to do my assignment and I was very tired. These tutors do not give us much information to guide us. For me that is not quality.

**Participant:** Some tutors provide quality tutoring because they do not have any lack on face-to-face.

**Participant:** Unisa should appoint quality tutors who have the relevant knowledge of the module, I didn't find information from the tutor and ended up getting another tutor who is a senior student to assist me.

**Participant:** Do the lecturers sit in the tutorial or online tutorial to see if these tutors provide the correct content to students? Sometimes I believe that Pretoria students receive the best quality of tutorials.

**Participant:** My 2nd level I didn't get good quality through VC which was very difficult module and I needed assistance Information science. Students who afforded fly a tutor from Pretoria to come and assist them, unfortunately I was not part of that because I couldn't afford.

**Participant:** I received the best quality tutor for my English module.

**Participant:** We need the credentials of a tutor so that we know that the tutor is quality tutor who knows the quality content.

**Participant:** A content should be simple to understand and if the tutor doesn't make it easy to understand it's not quality.

**5**. **Researcher**: What is the impact of the implementation of the ITM on student access and participation at Unisa?

**Participant:** *For me, Simplicity is key. With MyUnisa it is not easy to access instead one has to go from page to page to get to online discussions. The platform is a problem and a challenge for us to engage and interact in a discussion".*

**Participant:** The platform is a problem and a challenge for us to engage and interact in a discussion. There must be a video or a link that shows us how to navigate MyUnisa platform and access my module online discussion instead of going from page to page trying to get to the right site. In a scale of 1-10 of participation I will rate it at 4 because I don't normally participate and interact with other students and my tutor. I only interact with my books or with other students face to face and not online.

**Participant:** We expect tutors who will help us with our assignments and guiding us to prepare for examination. When that was not done I decided that I will not attend face to face tutorials anymore.

**Participant:** Access is good because we are able to access online discussions and interact with other students and solve problems ourselves. There is no problem at all.

**Participant:** At multipurpose centres and at the community library students can access internet and engage in discussions instead of travelling which requires us to travel and pay some money.

**Participant:** We don't use much of online tutors. Wi-Fi is good at the campus however it becomes slow because of the volume of students submission and becomes very slow. I must say that this used to be very slow however it has improved compared to previous years. I hate the fact that when one gets used to the MyUnisa site, in the next semester when you login you find that it has changed and not user friendly anymore.

**Participant:** There should be a video that explains the purpose of each module so that it gives us an overview of the module before we even start with the tutorial itself online or face to face.

**Participant:** Online tutors interact with us, they post questions and we answer or when we post questions they respond a couple of days posting the right answers to that questions.

**Participant:** Face to face like I said, they don't give us direct answers to questions and they throw us off a bit. Other than that, they are ok.

**6. Researcher:** In your mind, is the ITM suited to serve African students? Motivate your answer.

**Participants:** It's important that venues be expanded in the hub so that it can accommodate all students who use it or decentralise the service, do more live streaming sessions so that all students can be catered for irrespective of where they stay.

**Participants:** *ITM is not hundred percent perfect however there are challenges just like any other model*

**Participants:** Shared information through the livestreaming could open up possibilities of students gathering in the same place in the same location or township and watch the live streaming together and discuss. Or posted on Unisa site so that we can download it later on and watch it. Audio could also be explored.

**Participants:** *When you choose to study at Unisa you actually on your own and you need to find someone of the same module to socialise with and assist each other. That is the reason why I come to the campus to socialise and get help from my peers.*

**Participants:** Students are coming to Unisa because it is able to accommodate us since we come from different socio-economic backgrounds. Some of us do not have computer skills, we also understand that as Unisa students can compete in the global world. We also need to take responsibility and take initiative to open doors, ask questions so that we may be assisted as students. Send a message to students in a computer room and ask students if they need help, just a messaging to each computer. People should be aware of what is available for them to use at the campus.

**7. Researcher:** If not, what changes can you suggest to make it suitable for African students?

**Participants:** Mail us the presentations discussed in the tutorial classes. All the information must be shared with all students because they miss the class.

**Participants:** Increase computers in the computer labs, give us free data and laptops to access and participate since we are from poor communities.

**Participants:** Increase venues i.e. centres where we can come and use computers and Wi-Fi for free

**8**. **Researcher:** If you were given a chance to be in charge of the ITM, what would improve in it, if any and why?

**Participants:** I would focus on the assignments for students, I will post and ask questions regarding the questions and I will work with them towards the question, elaborate on the question I will not give those answers of course. Most the time tutors do not help us more with our assignments that is the reason why we go and get help outside Unisa for assignments.

**Participants:** I will appoint qualified, mean qualified who knows the content of the module to all colleges.

**Participants:** I would appoint tutors for all difficult modules like Maths and statistics to assist students. I am fine with online tutors however I will appreciate having a person physically present at the regional campus.

**Participants:** I will remove a VC and send a tutor to assist the students because VC is not that effective for us because of connectivity problems and sometimes we feel there is a gap between us and the tutor when we are tutored through the VC not unless connectivity is improved. This should be done for the modules with high failure rate.

**9. Researcher:** What are the crucial aspects that should be evaluated in the ITM to ensure that students' needs are met?

**Participants:** Evaluate the discussion forums regarding discussions of assignments.

**Participants:** Proper topics should be posted online

**Participants:** The use of whatsapp groups to improve communication

**Participants:** Efficiency on the marketing of the tutorial classes. This should not be done only once but they must send it often through the use of SMSs.

**Participants:** Accessing MyUnisa must be free of charge, we do not want to use data since we do not afford it.

**10. Researcher:** My last question to you is, of all the things we have discussed, do you think we have missed out anything?

The NSFAS money that is paid late and make us to delay having our school requirements.

**Researcher:** Thank you for taking your time to come and share this valuable information with me in this cold weather. I really appreciate. Have a good day and good luck with your coming exams.

## Appendix 16: Example 2 of Focus Group Interview

**Example 2 of the semi-structured interview session for focus groups**

**Focus group 2**

**Name of the recorder:** Galaxy S5

**Length of the audio:** 46min.49Sec

**Date of the interview**: 26 September 2019

**Transcription legend:** Researcher

Good afternoon and welcome to the session. Thank you for taking your time to come and participate in this discussion about the tutorial support programmes offered by Unisa. My name is Mrs Smangele Ntuli from the Department of Student Support at Unisa. I come from Pretoria and I am studying towards my doctoral degree in distance learning at Unisa.

You were identified and invited to this discussion because your participation to tutorial model offered by Unisa and because of your familiarity with this model.

I would like to emphasise that there are no wrong or right answers but different perspective on the issue at hand. Please feel free to ask any question or share your views as they are important for this discussion. Keep in mind that I do not only expect positive feedback, but negative feedback is also important for this discussion as it may assist to improve a lot of things in the programme.

The discussion will be recorded in order to assist not to miss any important information during this session. No names will be mentioned in the report. Be assured of confidentiality. Be assured that your privacy will be protected. You also need to undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality. All participants are expected to sign the consent form to undertake issue of confidentiality.

Before we can begin, is there anything you want clarity on?

**Participants:** I don't know if this will be relevant. I want to know why my study material is delaying so much. I have already paid for everything.

**Researcher**: Thank you for asking such a question. May I request that if you have any question that does not involve the tutorial programme we will put it in the bag and we will attend to it after the session. Know that every question is important. This means that your question will be responded to by me after the session. Is that fine with you all?

**Participants:** Yes, it is fine with us.

**1. Researcher:** Unisa provides tutorial support programme to its students through integrated tutor model (ITM). What is your understanding of this model? Anyone who would like to start? As I indicated before, there is no right or wrong answer.

**Participant:** Interaction between the students and the Teaching assistance in order to succeed.

**Researcher:** Thank you, another try? Yes Ma'am

**Participant:** I can say that it is a platform where we interact with our teaching assistance, tutors and lecturers.

**Researcher:** Thank you, any other different understanding? In the absence of none, we will move to the next question.

**2. Researcher:** What do you expect and need from the ITM? Let's start with the expectations.

**Participant:** Hmmm, I expect the tutor to answer all the questions I have of the module

**Participant:** I expect the tutor help me about the assignment and maybe examination questions

**Participant:** Tutors to help me when I have conflict with my assignments

**Participant:** To find out the easy way out of the module, tips about the module. Not exactly the answers.

**Researcher:** Ok, not exactly the answers. Great. Let us continue. What do you need from the ITM?

**Participant:** To teach me how to answer the questions on the module or approach the questions on assignments and questions.

**Participant:** I actually expect the tutor to teach me how to better understand the module.

**3. Researcher**: Would you say the ITM meets students' needs and expectations? Elaborate.

**Participant:** No and yes, ITM is not meeting my needs because I don't go on internet i.e. online, I only attend face to face. Yes, with face to face because I attend and No because I don't have internet at home.

**Participant:** Yes, face to face tutorials are helping me out, and now I know how to write an assignment. No as well because some of my modules are not offered and they are too difficult to understand. So, my expectations of getting support in the modules I registered for are not met.

**Participant:** The ITM is not really meeting my needs because the modules I am studying there are no tutors, discussion forums are not there, we rely on telegram discussion.

**Participant:** Giyani Centre doesn't have face to face tutors especially for xxx module, we are on our own here.

**Participant:** I have a tutor online but not face to face only attended once. And the online tutor is helpful but interrupted by internet most of the time. My expectation of connectivity is not met.

**Participant:** Face to face tutorials, I was not able to write my essay but when I attended I was assisted with English module and I was able to write my assignment and did well in this module.

**Participant:** Online tutors, I don't have money to engage online, I don't attend because I am a security guard and so it is impossible for me to attend. I am left with one module to finish my degree to be a teacher.

**4. Researcher:** Unisa promises to provide quality tutorial support to students. Share your views about the quality measures that Unisa promises students in the ITM.

**Participant:** Ehhhh, on my side I can say I use the e-tutor a lot for me to understand, they do not respond promptly to questions because you find that I am busy with an assignment and drop a question online for them to assist me but they respond after the assignment due date after I have submitted the

assignment and no longer need their response. I recommend that they should at least try to reply fast for me to complete the assignment.

**Participant:** I have never asked a question before online, however when it comes to assignment and other stuff they deliver on time (lecturers).

**Participant:** When you pop a question on online they do not give you an answer but instead they give a link and not respond directly. That link has a lot of information for you to read and you find that you only need a small portion for you to understand. I need a direct answer.

**Participant:** What Unisa promises to students it does not deliver because of the resources they allocate when it comes to computers, 3 computers for self-help and 10 computers in the computer labs.

**5**. **Researcher**: What is the impact of the implementation of the ITM on student access and participation at Unisa?

**Researcher:** Let's begin with access

**Participant:** Okay, as for me I don't have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the centre, when I come to do my assignment online I find that they queue is too long and I cannot access the computer. And the printer is not working

**Participant:** Maybe computers should be increased to increase accessibility. We only 10 computers at the centres for accessing MyUnisa. We are happy that the Wi-Fi have been improved when you have a smartphone.

**Participant:** Old people cannot use the computer because they are BBTs. I volunteer my time to assist them on Saturdays. I recommend that there should be someone based at the centre to assist them when they come.

Researcher: By the way what are BBTs?

Participant: Born before technology.

**Participant:** Jaaah, it's tough. MyUnisa has changed and is no longer friendly, I am struggling to access information on MyUnisa because of the way it is laid. It was easy before but now it is very difficult and it takes time. MyUnisa is down most of the time. Coming to the issue of computers, there are only 10 computers for accessing MyUnisa and 3 computers at the computer lab. The computer lab is big and can accommodate more or less 80 computers but we only have 3 computers. Giyani centre services plus 9 villages, 3 computers for self-help cannot do this. We are many but we have limited resources. We feel excluded from the online programs that Unisa uses. Yes, we have beautiful centre but it has no resources. What is the point of having a beautiful house without water, electricity, bed and other resources? It is useless. It's useless.

**Participant:** They say accessing MyUnisa was free on all networks and nowadays they say its only MTN, Vodacom and Telkom only its free. They say it is for free however when you use it is not for free. You cannot open MyLife email for free. Before MyUnisa was upgraded it was free but now it is not for free. We heard that it is still free but not here in Giyani.

**Researcher:** Let's now move to the impact of ITM on participation.
**Participant:** Accessing internet is a challenge in here, at the centre is the only place where we can access internet without interruptions. But the challenge is that we do not have enough computers. How can you come to campus without resources, it's pointless to come here and not have internet.
**Researcher:** What is centre management saying about this?
**Participant:** They say they are waiting for Pretoria to provide computers.
**Participant:** The issue of tutorial classes is that we do not have most of the modules hence the non-participation. As students we are discouraged to come for tutorials because we stay very far and when we come we do not have what we need as students. This just a beautiful building its pointless to come.
**Participant:** Mam'am Ntuli you don't know. Mathematics we only have a telegram where we discuss as students. VC facilities we do have however, they are not used because the internet is down most of the time.
**6. Researcher:** In your mind, is the ITM suited to serve African students? Motivate your answer.
**Participant:** The program meets my needs because I was first studying in a residential institution staying far from home and now I am staying at home and at the same time studying I can say that the program meets my needs. Less expensive program because I live in a rural area and poor conditions. It balances my academic life.
**Participant:** Not meeting my needs because I am majoring in Tshitsonga. The instructions are English and I must translate to Tshitsonga for me to answer the questions in English.
**Participant:** The ITM does not meet my needs since tutorials are conducted during the day because I am an employed students I cannot attend the modules that are available on campus. I recommend that Unisa should allow us to use the centre during the week to discuss with other students for us to help one another with our assignments. Students are not allowed to interact and study because the campus opens at 8h00 and closes at 15h30
**7. Researcher:** If not, what changes can you suggest to make it suitable for African students?
**Participant:** I recommend that the centre should close at 19h00 to accommodate students like us however, other students will not have transportation because they come very far.
**Participant:** I recommend that if my major is any other African language Unisa must write the exact. All languages are accommodated in the exam paper and there is no more translation. English is always prioritise when communicating with students.
**8**. **Researcher:** If you were given a chance to be in charge of the ITM, what would improve in it, if any and why?
**Participant:** Alright! I will make sure that all regional offices have tutors especially this one. I will start with Giyani.
**Participant:** May be I will communicate to all students that we cannot always rely on social groups, whatsapp and telegram messaging

**Participant:** As for me, I will change the way tutorials are presented. I will increase the use of technology to support students' e.g. VC.

**Participant:** We are not having a library here, I will make sure that there is a library because students need information from books in order for them to understand what tutors are helping us with.

**Participant:** I will ensure that we have more computers, we only have one VC venue

**Participant:** I will record the videos and share with students in order to get more knowledge of the module.

**9. Researcher:** What are the crucial aspects that should be evaluated in the ITM to ensure that students' needs are met?

**Participant:** I will evaluate the discussion forums turnaround time if tutors are responding on time because they are delaying the students.

**Participant:** Access to MyUnisa for me to interact online with my tutors and students

**Participant:** Assignment feedback should be prompt so that we do not repeat the same problems committed in the first assignments. Writing an examination without my feedback is not proper really because we cannot prepare well for our examinations.

**Participant:** Tutors need to indicate the time of their availability to engage with students both online and face to face.

**Participant:** I would like to say that tutors should manage their time for provision of feedback not answer 4 weeks after the question was asked. It's useless for students

**Participant:** No science tutors for face to face modules and we need these modules. Human intervention is needed when we do not understand e-tutors.

**Participant:** Extend the time and hours of participation in classes.

**10. Researcher:** My last question to you is, of all the things we have discussed, do you think we have missed out anything?

**Participant:** Not having tutors in critical modules, we feel left out and I want to know why?

**Participant:** the centre should close later atleaset at 19h00 to accommodate those who are working to come and access the computers.

**Researcher:** We have come to the end of this session. Once again thank you for your time and have a fruitful day and good luck with your coming exams.

**Appendix 17: Editor's letter**

*Barbara Shaw*

*Editing/proofreading services*

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**To whom it may concern**

This letter serves to inform you that I have done language editing, reference checking and formatting on the thesis:

**An evaluation of the effectiveness of the integrated tutor model in Open Distance Learning: A case of Unisa**

by **Cynthia Hlekwase Smangele Ntuli**

Barbara Shaw

23 June 2020

## Appendix 18: Data analysis for the ITM project

# Project: DATA ANALYSIS FOR ITM PROJECT

Report created by Ntulichs on 2020/10/29

## Code Report

(5) codes
Local filters:
Show codes in group Needs and expectations

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## Assignments and examination

**6 Quotations:**

**1:6 They expect tutors to give answers for assignments (1407:1456) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

They expect tutors to give answers for assignments

**1:24 We need tutors to be there for us to help us with assignments. Instead…… (45146:45349) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

We need tutors to be there for us to help us with assignments. Instead, they tell us that they are only available at certain times. Some of us fail because they were never there to respond to our queries.

**3:23 I don't have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the c…… (29640:29823) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

I don't have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the centre, when I come to do my assignment online I find that the queue is too long and I cannot access the computer.

**3:26 What makes us not to attend online tutorials and interact with tutors,…… (33497:33664) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

What makes us not to attend online tutorials and interact with tutors, content and other students is that we do not follow the guidelines given on the tutorial letters

**5:37 Assignment feedback should be prompt so that we do not repeat the same…… (16864:17129) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

Assignment feedback should be prompt so that we do not repeat the same problems committed in the first assignments. Writing an examination without my feedback is not

proper really because we cannot prepare well for our examinations. This should be evaluated by ITM”

**5:44 Evaluate the discussion forums regarding discussions of assignments. (21947:22015) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

Evaluate the discussion forums regarding discussions of assignments.

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## Attendance of tutorials

**7 Quotations:**

**1:5 The basic need is academic support from tutors (1340:1386) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

The basic need is academic support from tutors

**1:13 The university is not meeting students’ needs because modules that stu…… (9605:9799) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

The university is not meeting students’ needs because modules that students struggle with are not provided in a blended mode because some are only available online and not on face-to-face basis.

**1:20 All modules [must] be provided with face-to-face tutors. (38035:38091) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

All modules [must] be provided with face-to-face tutors.

**1:21 Face-to-face tutors provide guidance during face-to-face tutorials whe…… (44160:44255) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

Face-to-face tutors provide guidance during face-to-face tutorials when students attend classes.

**1:26 The tutor provides guidance during face-to-face tutorials. When studen…… (45523:45640) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

The tutor provides guidance during face-to-face tutorials. When students attend classes, this mode has few problems.

**3:1 Students do not interact with the tutors because communication is diff…… (1061:1237) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Students do not interact with the tutors because communication is difficult to say what they want to convey to tutors online and face-to-face students are shy to speak in class.

**3:26 What makes us not to attend online tutorials and interact with tutors,…… (33497:33664) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

What makes us not to attend online tutorials and interact with tutors, content and other students is that we do not follow the guidelines given on the tutorial letters

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## ○ Communication

**18 Quotations:**

### 1:3 Unisa has poor communication culture and they expect help however big…… (681:802) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

Unisa has poor communication culture and they expect help however big or small. Unisa staff do not pick up their phones.

### 1:4 Unisa students' expectations are not met because e-tutors respond afte…… (804:931) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

Unisa students' expectations are not met because e-tutors respond after a long time after the due date for assignment has passed

### 1:9 Communication is not good and prompt; tutors take forever to respond w…… (3905:4003) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

Communication is not good and prompt; tutors take forever to respond when you have posed a question

### 1:10 They expect communication to flow between the institution and them. C…… (6346:6466) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

They expect communication to flow between the institution and them. Communication is not filtered correctly to students.

### 1:11 Students also do not read their MyLife emails where most of the instit…… (6470:6668) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

Students also do not read their MyLife emails where most of the institutional communication goes to. Their MyLife emails are not linked to their private emails so that communication can flow easily.

### 1:12 MyUnisa is used to communicate to students, tutors give themselves 48…… (9458:9603) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

MyUnisa is used to communicate to students, tutors give themselves 48 hours turnaround time. However, Unisa is failing when it comes to this area

### 1:14 Students' needs to be responded to within 48hours of posting their con…… (9813:9906) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

Students' needs to be responded to within 48hours of posting their concerned on the platform.

### 1:15 All tutors should acknowledge that they have received the question and…… (33960:34128) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

All tutors should acknowledge that they have received the question and indicate when they will respond, to show that they have seen the question on the discussion forum.

### 2:16 sms communication system is utilised to ensure that the content of com…… (37641:38024) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

sms communication system is utilised to ensure that the content of communication is correct, e.g., tutorial cancellation and commencement of tutorial classes. F910 is very good and I commend the initiators of the function". (F910 is a communication system that was designed by the regions in collaboration with ICT to assist with communicating tutorial related matters to students.)

### 2:21 Quality of communication leaves a lot to be desired because the centre…… (43161:43503) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Quality of communication leaves a lot to be desired because the centre advertises for modules that will be offered however, you find that they are not offered until the semester is finished. No regional staff communicates why the modules were not offered. What is promised to students is not received. False expectations are created by Unisa.

### 2:25 Quality for me starts with a proper communication strategy used by Uni…… (48774:48965) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Quality for me starts with a proper communication strategy used by Unisa to communicate to Unisa students. Why I am saying that, it is because we will not win if our communication is not good.

### 2:27 communication should be enhanced; that is quality for me. (49200:49257) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

communication should be enhanced; that is quality for me.

### 3:9 Unisa has a lot of resources however, they are not well communicated t…… (7612:7727) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Unisa has a lot of resources however, they are not well communicated to students so that they use them as intended.

### 3:15 They should create the same understanding, have a tutor-tutor interact…… (21273:21412) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

They should create the same understanding, have a tutor-tutor interaction where they tutor the same module, even if it is a WhatsApp group.

### 5:5 Communication is very poor at Unisa Centre for Professional Developmen…… (1884:2245) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Communication is very poor at Unisa Centre for Professional Development (CPD) is like a sponge and just absorb. Out of 1000 applicants, we only appointed 10 people. We don't know where they are. All cracks are always blamed by HR. Other stakeholders do not come together as one towards a common goal. We will always fail because we do not communicate properly.

### 5:24 Communication protocol to be reviewed. (9928:9966) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Communication protocol to be reviewed.

### 5:45 The use of different medium of communication such as WhatsApp social m…… (22019:22141) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

The use of different medium of communication such as WhatsApp social media linked to tutorials, SMS, MyLife email and F910

### 5:46 Efficiency on the marketing of the tutorial classes. This should not b…… (22142:22284) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Efficiency on the marketing of the tutorial classes. This should not be done only once but they must send it often through the use of SMSs".

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## Flexibility tutorial schedule

**4 Quotations:**

### 1:16 There should be some level of flexibility that students needs be met t…… (34130:34388) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

There should be some level of flexibility that students needs be met that allocating time and modules for those who are working and those who are not working. At least, if we have two different slots to address the needs of different students' availability.

### 1:24 We need tutors to be there for us to help us with assignments. Instead…… (45146:45349) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

We need tutors to be there for us to help us with assignments. Instead, they tell us that they are only available at certain times. Some of us fail because they were never there to respond to our queries.

### 2:12 Flexibility: Not starting classes later in order to accommodate those…… (29140:29264) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Flexibility: Not starting classes later in order to accommodate those who stay far from the centre and travel long distance.

**5:39 There should be a block of tutorials five times, three to four hours,…… (17856:18002) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

There should be a block of tutorials five times, three to four hours, in order to cover for those who travel long distance to get all the support.

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## Tutor availability

**6 Quotations:**

**1:7 Students expect support in terms of availability of tutors at any time…… (1974:2050) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

Students expect support in terms of availability of tutors at any time online

**1:17 We need tutors to be available always online. We need the confirmation…… (36270:36485) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

We need tutors to be available always online. We need the confirmation from the tutor even though the students assist one another online. I will not take the student's gospel if the tutor does not confirm the answer.

**1:18 I need the tutor to provide feedback after I have posted online. The t…… (36487:36610) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

I need the tutor to provide feedback after I have posted online. The tutor takes too long to respond to our questions online

**1:19 Questions we posted in January are still online and never responded to…… (36612:36783) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

Questions we posted in January are still online and never responded to by some tutors. We end up assisting one another and rely on YouTube to assist us in our assignments.

**2:10 As a tutor I ensure quality service to students. The issue of proper a…… (25181:25292) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

As a tutor I ensure quality service to students. The issue of proper and clear communication is important to me.

**3:12 Tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them…… (17590:17764) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them clear before they start using it with students. Students will post questions, and thereafter will sum up.

## Project: DATA ANALYSIS FOR ITM PROJECT

Report created by Ntulichs on 2020/10/29

## Code Report

(4) codes
Local filters:
Show codes in group Quality of the ITM

## Quality of communication

**16 Quotations:**

**1:15 All tutors should acknowledge that they have received the question and…… (33960:34128) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

All tutors should acknowledge that they have received the question and indicate when they will respond, to show that they have seen the question on the discussion forum.

**1:18 I need the tutor to provide feedback after I have posted online. The t…… (36487:36610) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

I need the tutor to provide feedback after I have posted online. The tutor takes too long to respond to our questions online

**1:19 Questions we posted in January are still online and never responded to…… (36612:36783) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

Questions we posted in January are still online and never responded to by some tutors. We end up assisting one another and rely on YouTube to assist us in our assignments.

**1:25 It takes days and weeks for tutors to respond to queries and this disc…… (45351:45447) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

It takes days and weeks for tutors to respond to queries and this discourages us to engage online

**1:26 The tutor provides guidance during face-to-face tutorials. When studen…… (45523:45640) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

The tutor provides guidance during face-to-face tutorials. When students attend classes, this mode has few problems.

### 2:3 Online class captain is recommended by the researcher. (6848:6902) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Online class captain is recommended by the researcher.

### 2:4 Tutorial Letter 101 should explain briefly how F2F tutorial classes wo…… (8654:8881) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Tutorial Letter 101 should explain briefly how F2F tutorial classes work, where students can access them and how to get a time table for tutorial classes. An application is needed to provide easy access to the tutorial support.

### 2:10 As a tutor I ensure quality service to students. The issue of proper a…… (25181:25292) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

As a tutor I ensure quality service to students. The issue of proper and clear communication is important to me.

### 2:11 I ensure that there is proper communication between the tutor and stud…… (26295:26473) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

I ensure that there is proper communication between the tutor and students so that I am able to address what the lecturer is expecting me to address to students during the class.

### 2:13 Tutorial Letter 101 should explain briefly how F2F tutorial classes wo…… (30943:31170) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Tutorial Letter 101 should explain briefly how F2F tutorial classes work, where students can access them and how to get a time table for tutorial classes. An application is needed to provide easy access to the tutorial support.

### 2:16 sms communication system is utilised to ensure that the content of com…… (37641:38024) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

sms communication system is utilised to ensure that the content of communication is correct, e.g., tutorial cancellation and commencement of tutorial classes. F910 is very good and I commend the initiators of the function". (F910 is a communication system that was designed by the regions in collaboration with ICT to assist with communicating tutorial related matters to students.)

### 2:25 Quality for me starts with a proper communication strategy used by Uni…… (48774:48965) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Quality for me starts with a proper communication strategy used by Unisa to communicate to Unisa students. Why I am saying that, it is because we will not win if our communication is not good.

### 2:29 The quality of communication leaves a lot to be desired online. Tutors…… (49970:50337) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

The quality of communication leaves a lot to be desired online. Tutors delay to provide feedback to students online. Instead students sometimes prefer to engage with other students on WhatsApp groups because they know that they will receive assistance promptly especially if there is an assignment that needs to be submitted. WhatsApp helps us to interact as students.

**3:4 Some tutors always have students online. These are tutors who are enga…… (2453:2628) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Some tutors always have students online. These are tutors who are engaging and speak the language of the students, encouraging them and respond to their questions or queries.

**5:41 ITM should explore the use of a chatbox to assist students to get rapi…… (20039:20181) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

ITM should explore the use of a chatbox to assist students to get rapid responses. It is frustrating to wait for the whole week for an answer.

**5:45 The use of different medium of communication such as WhatsApp social m…… (22019:22141) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

The use of different medium of communication such as WhatsApp social media linked to tutorials, SMS, MyLife email and F910

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## Quality of resources

**8 Quotations:**

**2:18 What Unisa promises to students, it does not deliver because of the re…… (41421:41610) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

What Unisa promises to students, it does not deliver because of the resources they allocate when it comes to computers, three computers for self-help and ten computers in the computer labs.

**2:19 Content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is…… (42869:42961) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

Content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is the limited resources.

**2:20 Video conferencing tutorials are not of good quality as they are affec…… (42963:43159) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

Video conferencing tutorials are not of good quality as they are affected by network. Where there are not physical tutorials, VC is connected from another centre however, the network will fail you.

**3:16 Wi-Fi is available but not reliable because it gets on and off, same a…… (21912:22116) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Wi-Fi is available but not reliable because it gets on and off, same as the MyUnisa platform which is not user friendly to navigate and it is changed making it difficult for students to access My Modules.

**3:27 Some of the computers in the labs are not working and this compromises…… (34453:34590) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Some of the computers in the labs are not working and this compromises access because we cannot have resources that are not functioning.

**4:10 Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resourc…… (14157:14440) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resources and access to internet and Wi-Fi? But people in the rural areas do not have such. Unisa must rethink this strategy; we need to put centres in poor areas where students have difficulty accessing these resources.

**4:23 Unisa tries by all means to accommodate different types of students wh…… (32264:32465) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Unisa tries by all means to accommodate different types of students who have a poor background, it provides digital literacies for those who attend the trainings; this is a good support for the students

**5:17 There is a need to evaluate HR since there is too much delay in the ap…… (5897:6004) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

There is a need to evaluate HR since there is too much delay in the appointment of tutors on an annual basis

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## Quality of tutoring

**21 Quotations:**

**1:18 I need the tutor to provide feedback after I have posted online. The t…… (36487:36610) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

I need the tutor to provide feedback after I have posted online. The tutor takes too long to respond to our questions online

**2:5 Not all students get value for money because it is dependent how good…… (10991:11313) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

Not all students get value for money because it is dependent how good and active each tutor is, and how involved the lecturer is. One group may get value for money and the other group might not get it because tutors differ. That is why some students decide not to participate and end up dropping out of online tutor support

### 2:6 The e-tutors are evaluated formatively through monitoring report on a…… (11316:11398) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

The e-tutors are evaluated formatively through monitoring report on a weekly basis

### 2:7 Every student has a story to tell, so some can even single out some tu…… (21120:21281) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Every student has a story to tell, so some can even single out some tutors who contributed in their learning journey and [they] succeeded because of this support

### 2:10 As a tutor I ensure quality service to students. The issue of proper a…… (25181:25292) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

As a tutor I ensure quality service to students. The issue of proper and clear communication is important to me.

### 2:11 I ensure that there is proper communication between the tutor and stud…… (26295:26473) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

I ensure that there is proper communication between the tutor and students so that I am able to address what the lecturer is expecting me to address to students during the class.

### 2:15 Each college has a qualification framework and the tutor recruitment i…… (34760:35080) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Each college has a qualification framework and the tutor recruitment is done by HR however, no interviews are done. The process only uses qualification if the tutor qualifies. The challenge with this process is how do we know if the tutor is able to facilitate learning since this is a core function that she must perform

### 2:17 My experience is positive especially in accounting. I came to Unisa no…… (40159:40394) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

My experience is positive especially in accounting. I came to Unisa not knowing this subject but the tutor that was allocated to me helped me to understand accounting and I passed it very well hence I say some provide quality tutoring.

### 2:19 Content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is…… (42869:42961) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is the limited resources.

### 2:21 Quality of communication leaves a lot to be desired because the centre…… (43161:43503) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Quality of communication leaves a lot to be desired because the centre advertises for modules that will be offered however, you find that they are not offered until the semester is finished. No regional staff communicates why the modules were not offered. What is promised to students is not received. False expectations are created by Unisa.

### 2:22 In my case, the quality of tutors is good for English academic module……. (44785:45004) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

In my case, the quality of tutors is good for English academic module. It is very helpful and good and I am lacking in English. My marks are improving and I am happy ever since I started attending the face-to-face class.

### 2:28 Employ tutors who have experience in teaching and learning because tho…… (49836:49969) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Employ tutors who have experience in teaching and learning because those who have never taught cannot deliver the content to students

### 2:30 The online tutors should ensure that they post quality content to assi…… (51666:51968) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

The online tutors should ensure that they post quality content to assist students. Some tutors post old information. For instance, a tutor posted content that he posted last year in exact wording nothing changed and this made me to doubt her and I ended up not interacting because I lost faith in her.

### 3:4 Some tutors always have students online. These are tutors who are enga…… (2453:2628) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Some tutors always have students online. These are tutors who are engaging and speak the language of the students, encouraging them and respond to their questions or queries.

### 3:10 The lecturer's dedication and involvement to support the tutor plays a…… (10920:11181) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

The lecturer's dedication and involvement to support the tutor plays a very big role because if the lecturer has less interest and [is] less involved, the tutor tends to relax because she knows that the lecturer is not interested in the tutor support programme.

### 3:12 Tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them…… (17590:17764) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them clear before they start using it with students. Students will post questions, and thereafter will sum up.

### 5:20 On a yearly basis lecturers should discuss problem areas with tutors s…… (7870:8026) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

On a yearly basis lecturers should discuss problem areas with tutors so that tutors are able to tackle these areas in class as part of the plan for the year.

**5:21 We use a WhatsApp group to enhance our communication. (8028:8081) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

We use a WhatsApp group to enhance our communication.

**5:22 This could be enforced by the primary lecturer who will schedule VC di…… (8144:8564) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

This could be enforced by the primary lecturer who will schedule VC discussion groups that will be spearheaded by the tutors in order to show students that tutors know what the primary lecturer knows and the two work as a team. This should be done in the presence of a lecturer. Each tutor [is] to be given a topic to address during the VC because they are capable and able to address academic issues in their capacity.

**5:36 Record videos and share with students to get more knowledge of the mod…… (16789:16862) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

Record videos and share with students to get more knowledge of the module

**5:39 There should be a block of tutorials five times, three to four hours,…… (17856:18002) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

There should be a block of tutorials five times, three to four hours, in order to cover for those who travel long distance to get all the support.

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## Quality of tutors

**18 Quotations:**

**2:2 There is a huge gap between the e-tutors and F2F tutors; the scale of…… (5990:6181) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

There is a huge gap between the e-tutors and F2F tutors; the scale of F2F tutors should be increased since their tutorial sessions are more hectic and they travel to the venue to see students.

**2:6 The e-tutors are evaluated formatively through monitoring report on a…… (11316:11398) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

The e-tutors are evaluated formatively through monitoring report on a weekly basis

**2:7 Every student has a story to tell, so some can even single out some tu…… (21120:21281) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

Every student has a story to tell, so some can even single out some tutors who contributed in their learning journey and [they] succeeded because of this support

### 2:10 As a tutor I ensure quality service to students. The issue of proper a…… (25181:25292) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

As a tutor I ensure quality service to students. The issue of proper and clear communication is important to me.

### 2:11 I ensure that there is proper communication between the tutor and stud…… (26295:26473) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

I ensure that there is proper communication between the tutor and students so that I am able to address what the lecturer is expecting me to address to students during the class.

### 2:15 Each college has a qualification framework and the tutor recruitment i…… (34760:35080) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Each college has a qualification framework and the tutor recruitment is done by HR however, no interviews are done. The process only uses qualification if the tutor qualifies. The challenge with this process is how do we know if the tutor is able to facilitate learning since this is a core function that she must perform

### 2:17 My experience is positive especially in accounting. I came to Unisa no…… (40159:40394) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

My experience is positive especially in accounting. I came to Unisa not knowing this subject but the tutor that was allocated to me helped me to understand accounting and I passed it very well hence I say some provide quality tutoring.

### 2:19 Content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is…… (42869:42961) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is the limited resources.

### 2:22 In my case, the quality of tutors is good for English academic module.…… (44785:45004) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

In my case, the quality of tutors is good for English academic module. It is very helpful and good and I am lacking in English. My marks are improving and I am happy ever since I started attending the face-to-face class.

### 2:24 Quality measure starts from recruitment stage. (46499:46545) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Quality measure starts from recruitment stage.

### 2:28 Employ tutors who have experience in teaching and learning because tho…… (49836:49969) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Employ tutors who have experience in teaching and learning because those who have never taught cannot deliver the content to students

### 2:30 The online tutors should ensure that they post quality content to assi…… (51666:51968) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

The online tutors should ensure that they post quality content to assist students. Some tutors post old information. For instance, a tutor posted content that he posted last year in exact wording nothing changed and this made me to doubt her and I ended up not interacting because I lost faith in her.

### 3:10 The lecturer's dedication and involvement to support the tutor plays a…… (10920:11181) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

The lecturer's dedication and involvement to support the tutor plays a very big role because if the lecturer has less interest and [is] less involved, the tutor tends to relax because she knows that the lecturer is not interested in the tutor support programme.

### 3:12 Tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them…… (17590:17764) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them clear before they start using it with students. Students will post questions, and thereafter will sum up.

### 5:34 Old tutors should not be employed because they lose their effectivenes…… (15317:15388) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Old tutors should not be employed because they lose their effectiveness.

### 5:35 Old tutors are committed more than younger ones whose lives are too bu…… (15391:15463) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Old tutors are committed more than younger ones whose lives are too busy"

### 5:48 Tutors should be evaluated because they are expected to manage their t…… (23211:23365) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Tutors should be evaluated because they are expected to manage their time for provision of feedback, not to answer four weeks after the question was asked.

### 5:49 Prioritise employing Unisa alumni. (23832:23867) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Prioritise employing Unisa alumni.

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## Project: DATA ANALYSIS FOR ITM PROJECT

Report created by Ntulichs on 2020/10/29

## Code Report

(4) codes
Local filters:
Show codes in group Student access to ITM and participation

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### Access to internet and connectivity

**25 Quotations:**

**2:13 Tutorial Letter 101 should explain briefly how F2F tutorial classes wo…… (30943:31170) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

Tutorial Letter 101 should explain briefly how F2F tutorial classes work, where students can access them and how to get a time table for tutorial classes. An application is needed to provide easy access to the tutorial support.

**2:19 Content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is…… (42869:42961) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

Content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is the limited resources.

**2:20 Video conferencing tutorials are not of good quality as they are affec…… (42963:43159) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

Video conferencing tutorials are not of good quality as they are affected by network. Where there are not physical tutorials, VC is connected from another centre however, the network will fail you.

**3:8 Unisa has made resources accessible to students but the accessibility…… (7213:7610) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Unisa has made resources accessible to students but the accessibility should be measured with the usability. The two are power twins. It doesn't help to make resources accessible if they are not used by students. Hence, Academic Support Coordinators (ASCs) and Digital Literacy Advisors (DLAs) work together to train students on Microsoft packages that will enable them to do their online modules.

**3:16 Wi-Fi is available but not reliable because it gets on and off, same a…… (21912:22116) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Wi-Fi is available but not reliable because it gets on and off, same as the MyUnisa platform which is not user friendly to navigate and it is changed making it difficult for students to access My Modules.

### 3:20 Students move from rural areas in order to get access to Unisa resourc…… (26442:26610) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Students move from rural areas in order to get access to Unisa resources, computers, tutors online and interact as expected. We do not get help if we stay in such areas.

### 3:21 Wi-Fi has been improved. When you have a smartphone, you will be able…… (26612:26795) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Wi-Fi has been improved. When you have a smartphone, you will be able to access internet, participate and interact online. A good Wi-Fi connection needs a computer in a good condition.

### 3:22 The computer labs are not enough and our computers are not well mainta…… (26797:27053) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

The computer labs are not enough and our computers are not well maintained hence they prevent accessibility and we are not able to participate and interact online with fellow students and tutors. It has been six months that some computers are not working.

### 3:23 I don’t have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the c…… (29640:29823) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

I don’t have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the centre, when I come to do my assignment online I find that the queue is too long and I cannot access the computer.

### 3:24 MyUnisa digital literacies workshops/trainings are very helpful. (31869:31932) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

MyUnisa digital literacies workshops/trainings are very helpful.

### 3:25 If you do not have a laptop it is a challenge to be fully committed, I…… (31934:32087) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

If you do not have a laptop it is a challenge to be fully committed, I cannot share what I studied with other students online but can do it face-to-face.

### 4:4 We cannot expect students to access internet if they do not have gadge…… (6131:6260) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

We cannot expect students to access internet if they do not have gadgets with big screen so for them to read properly, like really

### 4:6 Africanisation and the 4th industrial revolution do not meet. Most stu…… (9070:9266) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Africanisation and the 4th industrial revolution do not meet. Most students move from rural areas to cities in order to access a number of supports that will help them to succeed in their studies.

### 4:7 Students should start with the traditional way of learning and slowly…… (10170:10436) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Students should start with the traditional way of learning and slowly move to the modern way of learning or engaging with the learning environment and participants. The right resources should be given to students so that they find it interesting and easy to engage.

### 4:8 Does the infrastructure include our student because, when we conduct o…… (11233:11516) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Does the infrastructure include our student because, when we conduct online classes and VC classes, if the infrastructure is not well off in rural areas, such students are automatically excluded from the support that Unisa wants to provide for them. Students need access to internet.

### 4:9 Some students are comfortable staying in the deep rural areas and want…… (12303:12458) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Some students are comfortable staying in the deep rural areas and want to study staying there. However, they must be given the support they need to succeed.

### 4:10 Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resourc…… (14157:14440) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resources and access to internet and Wi-Fi? But people in the rural areas do not have such. Unisa must rethink this strategy; we need to put centres in poor areas where students have difficulty accessing these resources.

### 4:12 Mpumalanga is a very big province and there are many students in this…… (24182:24426) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Mpumalanga is a very big province and there are many students in this region. There are only two centres, i.e., Nelspruit and Middleburg. Unisa needs to do its analysis well and establish another centre in order to increase access for students.

### 4:17 Shared information through the livestreaming could open up possibiliti…… (30486:30690) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Shared information through the livestreaming could open up possibilities of students gathering in the same place in the same location or township and watching the live streaming together and discuss [it]

### 4:20 I don’t have taxi fees to access the campus and I feel disadvantaged a…… (31772:31854) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

I don’t have taxi fees to access the campus and I feel disadvantaged and excluded.

### 4:21 We still travelling between 160-200km, one hour and half to come and a…… (31856:31958) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

We still travelling between 160-200km, one hour and half to come and attend tutorials every Saturdays.

**4:23 Unisa tries by all means to accommodate different types of students wh…… (32264:32465) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Unisa tries by all means to accommodate different types of students who have a poor background, it provides digital literacies for those who attend the trainings; this is a good support for the students

**4:26 While I was busy doing my assignment, there was an elderly student who…… (37560:37717) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

While I was busy doing my assignment, there was an elderly student who didn't know how to use a computer. I had to help her to type and submit her assignment.

**4:29 I feel excluded as a black child. In our high school there were no com…… (39798:40067) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

I feel excluded as a black child. In our high school there were no computers, it was not easy for me with End User Programming (EUP). When you get into the lab at Unisa, I felt so inferior and afraid, and embarrassed to ask because everyone seems to know what they doing

**5:27 Team Geeks which collaborated with all Unisa campuses around Gauteng t…… (11242:11602) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

Team Geeks which collaborated with all Unisa campuses around Gauteng to provide computer skills to children so that a good computer skills foundation should be built. These are good efforts aiming at empowering learners from basic education. Unisa should collaborate with such companies in order to provide computer training to its students wherever they are.

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## Availability of resources

**23 Quotations:**

**1:27 Avail tutorial venues for studying purposes. (47860:47904) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

Avail tutorial venues for studying purposes.

**2:18 What Unisa promises to students, it does not deliver because of the re…… (41421:41610) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

What Unisa promises to students, it does not deliver because of the resources they allocate when it comes to computers, three computers for self-help and ten computers in the computer labs.

### 2:19 Content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is…… (42869:42961) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is the limited resources.

### 2:23 Unisa did not distribute resources fairly, There is a major gap when i…… (45007:45202) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Unisa did not distribute resources fairly, There is a major gap when it comes to quality, because of the inequality on the distribution of resources between the regional service centres of Unisa.

### 3:8 Unisa has made resources accessible to students but the accessibility…… (7213:7610) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Unisa has made resources accessible to students but the accessibility should be measured with the usability. The two are power twins. It doesn't help to make resources accessible if they are not used by students. Hence, Academic Support Coordinators (ASCs) and Digital Literacy Advisors (DLAs) work together to train students on Microsoft packages that will enable them to do their online modules.

### 3:9 Unisa has a lot of resources however, they are not well communicated t…… (7612:7727) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Unisa has a lot of resources however, they are not well communicated to students so that they use them as intended.

### 3:14 Some students who are doing online modules do not have computer litera…… (20129:20374) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Some students who are doing online modules do not have computer literacy skills. As a result, Digital Literacy Advisors (DLAs) in the regional centres provide them with computer training so that they are able to engage online with the modules.

### 3:16 Wi-Fi is available but not reliable because it gets on and off, same a…… (21912:22116) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Wi-Fi is available but not reliable because it gets on and off, same as the MyUnisa platform which is not user friendly to navigate and it is changed making it difficult for students to access My Modules.

### 3:21 Wi-Fi has been improved. When you have a smartphone, you will be able…… (26612:26795) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Wi-Fi has been improved. When you have a smartphone, you will be able to access internet, participate and interact online. A good Wi-Fi connection needs a computer in a good condition.

### 3:23 I don’t have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the c…… (29640:29823) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

I don’t have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the centre, when I come to do my assignment online I find that the queue is too long and I cannot access the computer.

### 3:25 If you do not have a laptop it is a challenge to be fully committed, I…… (31934:32087) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

If you do not have a laptop it is a challenge to be fully committed, I cannot share what I studied with other students online but can do it face-to-face.

### 4:4 We cannot expect students to access internet if they do not have gadge…… (6131:6260) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

We cannot expect students to access internet if they do not have gadgets with big screen so for them to read properly, like really

### 4:7 Students should start with the traditional way of learning and slowly…… (10170:10436) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Students should start with the traditional way of learning and slowly move to the modern way of learning or engaging with the learning environment and participants. The right resources should be given to students so that they find it interesting and easy to engage.

### 4:8 Does the infrastructure include our student because, when we conduct o…… (11233:11516) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Does the infrastructure include our student because, when we conduct online classes and VC classes, if the infrastructure is not well off in rural areas, such students are automatically excluded from the support that Unisa wants to provide for them. Students need access to internet.

### 4:9 Some students are comfortable staying in the deep rural areas and want…… (12303:12458) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Some students are comfortable staying in the deep rural areas and want to study staying there. However, they must be given the support they need to succeed.

### 4:10 Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resourc…… (14157:14440) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resources and access to internet and Wi-Fi? But people in the rural areas do not have such. Unisa must rethink this strategy; we need to put centres in poor areas where students have difficulty accessing these resources.

### 4:13 The centres should be located within reach where students can access r…… (28260:28366) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

The centres should be located within reach where students can access resources and be involved in the ITM".

### 4:15 ITM venues must be free of tsotsis. Tsotsis are thugs who target anyon…… (28464:28655) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

ITM venues must be free of tsotsis. Tsotsis are thugs who target anyone and rob them of their belongings.

Online modules are strenuous for new students coming from a poor and rural background.

### 4:17 Shared information through the livestreaming could open up possibiliti…… (30486:30690) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Shared information through the livestreaming could open up possibilities of students gathering in the same place in the same location or township and watching the live streaming together and discuss [it]

### 4:23 Unisa tries by all means to accommodate different types of students wh…… (32264:32465) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Unisa tries by all means to accommodate different types of students who have a poor background, it provides digital literacies for those who attend the trainings; this is a good support for the students

### 4:24 Unisa in Pretoria is a lion but the Unisa in Mthatha is a cat. This me…… (32468:32686) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Unisa in Pretoria is a lion but the Unisa in Mthatha is a cat. This means that there are no equal standards placed to manage Unisa campuses and this excludes students in rural areas like Mthatha, Lusikisiki and Mahikeng

### 4:27 I am expected by the university to connect online for my online module…… (37719:37927) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

I am expected by the university to connect online for my online modules however, as an African university student, I cannot afford to buy a computer, instead I depend on the university computer lab to connect.

### 5:33 Increase the number of VCs to support students and "Record videos and…… (15190:15315) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Increase the number of VCs to support students and "Record videos and share with students to get more knowledge of the module

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## Interaction and participation

**18 Quotations:**

### 1:19 Questions we posted in January are still online and never responded to…… (36612:36783) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

Questions we posted in January are still online and never responded to by some tutors. We end up assisting one another and rely on YouTube to assist us in our assignments.

### 2:5 Not all students get value for money because it is dependent how good…… (10991:11313) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Not all students get value for money because it is dependent how good and active each tutor is, and how involved the lecturer is. One group may get value for money and the other group might not get it because tutors differ. That is why some students decide not to participate and end up dropping out of online tutor support

### 2:9 Because there is low participation online I then use the medium that t…… (25059:25179) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Because there is low participation online I then use the medium that they are used to that motivates them to participate.

### 3:1 Students do not interact with the tutors because communication is diff…… (1061:1237) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Students do not interact with the tutors because communication is difficult to say what they want to convey to tutors online and face-to-face students are shy to speak in class.

### 3:3 Some students are just lurkers and are not interacting online. They op…… (1454:1652) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Some students are just lurkers and are not interacting online. They open and view the discussion forum. Those who are interacting assist a lot because sometimes the tutor takes too long to respond.

### 3:5 Opening and viewing cannot be classified as participation. What is con…… (6156:6432) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Opening and viewing cannot be classified as participation. What is considered as participation is when a student gets online, reads and writes something for the tutor or other students to read and respond if needed. Other colleges consider opening and viewing as participation.

### 3:6 I discourage the use of WhatsApp because they are not protected when t…… (6435:6600) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

I discourage the use of WhatsApp because they are not protected when they work in this social space. A lot of misconduct happens. Students are not safe in that space

### 3:7 Students only interact online during exams because they want to pass a…… (7002:7211) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Students only interact online during exams because they want to pass and want answers for exams. They only want the output and they don't want to go through the process and they are not even penalised for that

### 3:11 We need to look at how we use social media to enhance participation in…… (12171:12606) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

We need to look at how we use social media to enhance participation in class and online. How can we incorporate WhatsApp in our teaching and learning as it helps us to enhance participation online and face-to-face? Sometimes I play a silent observer online as a tutor and on WhatsApp and leave them to interact on their own and solve problems and intervene when necessary. This gives them sufficient time to interact among themselves.

### 3:12 Tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them…… (17590:17764) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them clear before they start using it with students. Students will post questions, and thereafter will sum up.

### 3:14 Some students who are doing online modules do not have computer litera…… (20129:20374) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Some students who are doing online modules do not have computer literacy skills. As a result, Digital Literacy Advisors (DLAs) in the regional centres provide them with computer training so that they are able to engage online with the modules.

### 3:22 The computer labs are not enough and our computers are not well mainta…… (26797:27053) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

The computer labs are not enough and our computers are not well maintained hence they prevent accessibility and we are not able to participate and interact online with fellow students and tutors. It has been six months that some computers are not working.

### 3:25 If you do not have a laptop it is a challenge to be fully committed, I…… (31934:32087) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

If you do not have a laptop it is a challenge to be fully committed, I cannot share what I studied with other students online but can do it face-to-face.

### 3:29 For me, Simplicity is key. With MyUnisa it is not easy to access inste…… (38687:38911) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

For me, Simplicity is key. With MyUnisa it is not easy to access instead one has to go from page to page to get to online discussions. The platform is a problem and a challenge for us to engage and interact in a discussion.

### 4:17 Shared information through the livestreaming could open up possibiliti…… (30486:30690) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Shared information through the livestreaming could open up possibilities of students gathering in the same place in the same location or township and watching the live streaming together and discuss [it]

### 4:33 ITM is not hundred percent perfect however there are challenges just l…… (42492:42804) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

ITM is not hundred percent perfect however there are challenges just like any other model".

When you choose to study at Unisa you actually on your own and you need to find someone of the same module to socialise with and assist each other. That is the reason why I come to the campus and get help from my peers.

### 5:21 We use a WhatsApp group to enhance our communication. (8028:8081) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

We use a WhatsApp group to enhance our communication.

### 5:50 "Peer to peer learning should be done because students learn better wi…… (24903:24982) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

"Peer to peer learning should be done because students learn better with peers".

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## ● Stakeholders relationship building

**19 Quotations:**

### 2:1 The involvement of lecturers is very important in the sense that the l…… (3413:3862) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

The involvement of lecturers is very important in the sense that the lecturer can go through the information that is posted by the tutor and confirm its relevancy however if the lecturer is not involved there is a compromise of quality … Lecturers are minimally involved in this process and this only compromises quality because they are the ones who must check the quality of personnel employed for tutoring, I am speaking for my college of course.

### 2:14 Module lecturers should be involved and they should receive the work p…… (32751:32949) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Module lecturers should be involved and they should receive the work plan and comment based on the tutor guideline they sent to tutors. The tutor and module lecturer should sing from the same note.

### 2:26 The task team was set [up] to look at tutor appointments, standardisat…… (48967:49198) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

The task team was set [up] to look at tutor appointments, standardisation, monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure that everything is properly managed within the college. Everyone is involved in the tutor recruitment process".

### 3:2 Communities of Practice (COP) should be joined by the lecturers so tha…… (1239:1335) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Communities of Practice (COP) should be joined by the lecturers so that they are on the same page

### 3:10 The lecturer's dedication and involvement to support the tutor plays a…… (10920:11181) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

The lecturer's dedication and involvement to support the tutor plays a very big role because if the lecturer has less interest and [is] less involved, the tutor tends to relax because she knows that the lecturer is not interested in the tutor support programme.

### 3:15 They should create the same understanding, have a tutor-tutor interact…… (21273:21412) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

They should create the same understanding, have a tutor-tutor interaction where they tutor the same module, even if it is a WhatsApp group.

### 5:2 by limiting the number of the stakeholders involved in the appointment…… (1269:1432) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

by limiting the number of the stakeholders involved in the appointment of tutors. If a single office deals with this, it would be easy and quick to appoint [them].

### 5:5 Communication is very poor at Unisa Centre for Professional Developmen…… (1884:2245) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Communication is very poor at Unisa Centre for Professional Development (CPD) is like a sponge and just absorb. Out of 1000 applicants, we only appointed 10 people. We don't know where they are. All cracks are always blamed by HR. Other stakeholders do not come together as one towards a common goal. We will always fail because we do not communicate properly.

### 5:6 Tutoring should be recognised and be taken seriously at Unisa especial…… (2526:2734) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Tutoring should be recognised and be taken seriously at Unisa especially by academics. Some academics do not see the relevance of the tutor support. They feel that it is too much work and is a waste of money.

### 5:9 Decisions taken by colleges regarding support services in terms of HR…… (3052:3231) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Decisions taken by colleges regarding support services in terms of HR offering should be communicated with the regional staff from the beginning and not late for planning purposes

### 5:10 Academics need to support tutors both face-to-face and e-tutors. Let u…… (3959:4210) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Academics need to support tutors both face-to-face and e-tutors. Let us be accessible and available to students … Change the minds of academics to view tutors as a group of people who are milking the cow and add no value to students' learning journey.

### 5:14 Break the ranking and bureaucracy that exists in the system and delays…… (4890:5261) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Break the ranking and bureaucracy that exists in the system and delays, e.g., contracting of the tutors. These ranks do not address quality management at all instead it ticks the box we think it addresses quality. If these ranks are removed, we will have to come up with quality management systems that would address corruption. It has nothing to do with the core business

### 5:18 I feel that HR is failing ITM because it delays the appointment of tut…… (6006:6097) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

I feel that HR is failing ITM because it delays the appointment of tutors year in, year out.

### 5:20 On a yearly basis lecturers should discuss problem areas with tutors s…… (7870:8026) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

On a yearly basis lecturers should discuss problem areas with tutors so that tutors are able to tackle these areas in class as part of the plan for the year.

### 5:22 This could be enforced by the primary lecturer who will schedule VC di…… (8144:8564) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

This could be enforced by the primary lecturer who will schedule VC discussion groups that will be spearheaded by the tutors in order to show students that tutors know what the primary lecturer knows and the two work as a team. This should be done in the presence of a lecturer. Each tutor [is] to be given a topic to address during the VC because they are capable and able to address academic issues in their capacity.

### 5:23 I work as an e-tutor and as F2F tutor. I see the effort being put in b…… (8566:8764) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

I work as an e-tutor and as F2F tutor. I see the effort being put in both tutorial programmes by academics. To avoid such differences and tutors resigning from F2F to online, better [to] mix them.

### 5:25 F2F do their own thing with very little or no support from module lect…… (9968:10208) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

F2F do their own thing with very little or no support from module lecturers whereas e-tutors get all the support, for example, prescribed books, tutor guidelines, monitoring by academics as well as quality assurance for the work done online"

**5:28 E-tutors have an online platform that they use to interact with studen…… (11974:12229) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

E-tutors have an online platform that they use to interact with students while F2F tutors do not have such a platform hence they end up creating social media platforms to share content because they also need to have an online platform much as they are F2F.

**5:52 To enhance this relationship so that lecturers are able to engage with…… (25119:25625) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

To enhance this relationship so that lecturers are able to engage with us with the latest developments within the module e.g. when the legislation has changed, accounting standards that changes, lecturers are the ones who should call an online meeting or VC and talk about these issues so that we, as tutors, are able to take this further to our students in class. We need to keep abreast with the latest developments and be on par with what is happening on the ground regarding the module we are tutoring.

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## Project: DATA ANALYSIS FOR ITM PROJECT

Report created by Ntulichs on 2020/10/29

## Code Report

(7) codes
Local filters:
Show codes in group Africanisation of the ITM

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## Barriers to learning

**31 Quotations:**

**3:1 Students do not interact with the tutors because communication is diff…… (1061:1237) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Students do not interact with the tutors because communication is difficult to say what they want to convey to tutors online and face-to-face students are shy to speak in class.

**3:4 Some tutors always have students online. These are tutors who are enga…… (2453:2628) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Some tutors always have students online. These are tutors who are engaging and speak the language of the students, encouraging them and respond to their questions or queries.

### 3:14 Some students who are doing online modules do not have computer litera…… (20129:20374) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Some students who are doing online modules do not have computer literacy skills. As a result, Digital Literacy Advisors (DLAs) in the regional centres provide them with computer training so that they are able to engage online with the modules.

### 3:18 The discussion forum is fine and I am able to contribute as expected a…… (26222:26383) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

The discussion forum is fine and I am able to contribute as expected as I interact with my study material and contribute to the platform and help other students.

### 3:19 It is simple with face-to-face because I attend classes. (26385:26440) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

It is simple with face-to-face because I attend classes.

### 3:20 Students move from rural areas in order to get access to Unisa resourc…… (26442:26610) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Students move from rural areas in order to get access to Unisa resources, computers, tutors online and interact as expected. We do not get help if we stay in such areas.

### 3:22 The computer labs are not enough and our computers are not well mainta…… (26797:27053) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

The computer labs are not enough and our computers are not well maintained hence they prevent accessibility and we are not able to participate and interact online with fellow students and tutors. It has been six months that some computers are not working.

### 3:23 I don’t have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the c…… (29640:29823) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

I don’t have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the centre, when I come to do my assignment online I find that the queue is too long and I cannot access the computer.

### 3:26 What makes us not to attend online tutorials and interact with tutors,…… (33497:33664) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

What makes us not to attend online tutorials and interact with tutors, content and other students is that we do not follow the guidelines given on the tutorial letters

### 3:29 For me, Simplicity is key. With MyUnisa it is not easy to access inste…… (38687:38911) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

For me, Simplicity is key. With MyUnisa it is not easy to access instead one has to go from page to page to get to online discussions. The platform is a problem and a challenge for us to engage and interact in a discussion.

### 4:3 Students should be taught for the first few classes before facilitatio…… (5130:5272) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Students should be taught for the first few classes before facilitation should be done in order for them to adjust easily in the ODEL context.

### 4:4 We cannot expect students to access internet if they do not have gadge…… (6131:6260) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

We cannot expect students to access internet if they do not have gadgets with big screen so for them to read properly, like really

### 4:5 he model does not consider the background of each students that enters…… (8927:9068) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

he model does not consider the background of each students that enters the system, it treats everyone the same irrespective of the background.

### 4:6 Africanisation and the 4th industrial revolution do not meet. Most stu…… (9070:9266) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Africanisation and the 4th industrial revolution do not meet. Most students move from rural areas to cities in order to access a number of supports that will help them to succeed in their studies.

### 4:7 Students should start with the traditional way of learning and slowly…… (10170:10436) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Students should start with the traditional way of learning and slowly move to the modern way of learning or engaging with the learning environment and participants. The right resources should be given to students so that they find it interesting and easy to engage.

### 4:8 Does the infrastructure include our student because, when we conduct o…… (11233:11516) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Does the infrastructure include our student because, when we conduct online classes and VC classes, if the infrastructure is not well off in rural areas, such students are automatically excluded from the support that Unisa wants to provide for them. Students need access to internet.

### 4:10 Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resourc…… (14157:14440) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resources and access to internet and Wi-Fi? But people in the rural areas do not have such. Unisa must rethink

this strategy; we need to put centres in poor areas where students have difficulty accessing these resources.

### 4:11 Distance travelled by students who are expected to come and attend cla…… (20217:20314) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Distance travelled by students who are expected to come and attend classes is a serious challenge

### 4:12 Mpumalanga is a very big province and there are many students in this…… (24182:24426) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Mpumalanga is a very big province and there are many students in this region. There are only two centres, i.e., Nelspruit and Middleburg. Unisa needs to do its analysis well and establish another centre in order to increase access for students.

### 4:13 The centres should be located within reach where students can access r…… (28260:28366) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

The centres should be located within reach where students can access resources and be involved in the ITM".

### 4:14 Bring the ITM to students and not that students should travel a long d…… (28368:28462) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Bring the ITM to students and not that students should travel a long distance to access the ITM

### 4:15 ITM venues must be free of tsotsis. Tsotsis are thugs who target anyon…… (28464:28655) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

ITM venues must be free of tsotsis. Tsotsis are thugs who target anyone and rob them of their belongings.

Online modules are strenuous for new students coming from a poor and rural background.

### 4:16 I am majoring in Tshitsonga. The instructions are English and I must t…… (30325:30483) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

I am majoring in Tshitsonga. The instructions are English and I must translate to Tshitsonga for me to answer the questions in English online and face-to-fac.

### 4:21 We still travelling between 160-200km, one hour and half to come and a…… (31856:31958) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

We still travelling between 160-200km, one hour and half to come and attend tutorials every Saturdays.

### 4:23 Unisa tries by all means to accommodate different types of students wh…… (32264:32465) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Unisa tries by all means to accommodate different types of students who have a poor background, it provides digital literacies for those who attend the trainings; this is a good support for the students

### 4:26 While I was busy doing my assignment, there was an elderly student who…… (37560:37717) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

While I was busy doing my assignment, there was an elderly student who didn't know how to use a computer. I had to help her to type and submit her assignment.

### 4:27 I am expected by the university to connect online for my online module…… (37719:37927) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

I am expected by the university to connect online for my online modules however, as an African university student, I cannot afford to buy a computer, instead I depend on the university computer lab to connect.

### 4:29 I feel excluded as a black child. In our high school there were no com…… (39798:40067) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

I feel excluded as a black child. In our high school there were no computers, it was not easy for me with End User Programming (EUP). When you get into the lab at Unisa, I felt so inferior and afraid, and embarrassed to ask because everyone seems to know what they doing

### 4:30 nglish is always prioritised when communicating with students (40071:40131) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

nglish is always prioritised when communicating with students

### 5:27 Team Geeks which collaborated with all Unisa campuses around Gauteng t…… (11242:11602) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Team Geeks which collaborated with all Unisa campuses around Gauteng to provide computer skills to children so that a good computer skills foundation should be built. These are good efforts aiming at empowering learners from basic education. Unisa should collaborate with such companies in order to provide computer training to its students wherever they are.

### 5:43 Volunteers to work in the labs for assisting in the computer labs othe…… (21547:21943) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Volunteers to work in the labs for assisting in the computer labs other than the DLAs. These students will be empowered and skilled and be given experience in the workplace. This will help with Africanicity because, as the students assist other students in the labs and tutorials, they can use their own languages and get explanation in their own languages and dialect understanding will be built.

## Exodus to urban areas

**11 Quotations:**

**3:20 Students move from rural areas in order to get access to Unisa resourc…… (26442:26610) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Students move from rural areas in order to get access to Unisa resources, computers, tutors online and interact as expected. We do not get help if we stay in such areas.

**3:22 The computer labs are not enough and our computers are not well mainta…… (26797:27053) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

The computer labs are not enough and our computers are not well maintained hence they prevent accessibility and we are not able to participate and interact online with fellow students and tutors. It has been six months that some computers are not working.

**3:23 I don't have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the c…… (29640:29823) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

I don't have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the centre, when I come to do my assignment online I find that the queue is too long and I cannot access the computer.

**4:5 he model does not consider the background of each students that enters…… (8927:9068) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

he model does not consider the background of each students that enters the system, it treats everyone the same irrespective of the background.

**4:6 Africanisation and the 4th industrial revolution do not meet. Most stu…… (9070:9266) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Africanisation and the 4th industrial revolution do not meet. Most students move from rural areas to cities in order to access a number of supports that will help them to succeed in their studies.

**4:8 Does the infrastructure include our student because, when we conduct o…… (11233:11516) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Does the infrastructure include our student because, when we conduct online classes and VC classes, if the infrastructure is not well off in rural areas, such students are automatically excluded from the support that Unisa wants to provide for them. Students need access to internet.

**4:9 Some students are comfortable staying in the deep rural areas and want…… (12303:12458) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Some students are comfortable staying in the deep rural areas and want to study staying there. However, they must be given the support they need to succeed.

### 4:10 Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resourc…… (14157:14440) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resources and access to internet and Wi-Fi? But people in the rural areas do not have such. Unisa must rethink this strategy; we need to put centres in poor areas where students have difficulty accessing these resources.

### 4:13 The centres should be located within reach where students can access r…… (28260:28366) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

The centres should be located within reach where students can access resources and be involved in the ITM".

### 4:14 Bring the ITM to students and not that students should travel a long d…… (28368:28462) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Bring the ITM to students and not that students should travel a long distance to access the ITM

### 4:22 Students come as far as Botswana. Why can't the university have a camp…… (31960:32262) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Students come as far as Botswana. Why can't the university have a campus to support such students? Unisa must reach out we cannot suffer as we did in our past apartheid period. Students cannot travel 300km to get support.

Ensure that all students access support nearer to their areas where they live in.

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## Facilitation of learning and teaching of the content

**23 Quotations:**

### 1:1 They expect to be spoon-fed, they don't attend f2f classes and they do…… (186:279) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

They expect to be spoon-fed, they don't attend f2f classes and they do not participate online.

### 1:2 They expect to be taught just like at high school (282:330) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students

They expect to be taught just like at high school

**1:18 I need the tutor to provide feedback after I have posted online. The t…… (36487:36610) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

I need the tutor to provide feedback after I have posted online. The tutor takes too long to respond to our questions online

**1:20 All modules [must] be provided with face-to-face tutors. (38035:38091) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

All modules [must] be provided with face-to-face tutors.

**1:22 I expect to be taught the content and receive the best. (44723:44777) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

I expect to be taught the content and receive the best.

**1:23 I don't have any expectations from Unisa but I know that I have do to…… (44779:44977) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

I don't have any expectations from Unisa but I know that I have do to most of the work by myself and not to rely on a tutor even though I attend face-to-face tutorials which are very helpful to me.

**1:24 We need tutors to be there for us to help us with assignments. Instead…… (45146:45349) - D 1: Q1-Needs and expectations of students**

We need tutors to be there for us to help us with assignments. Instead, they tell us that they are only available at certain times. Some of us fail because they were never there to respond to our queries.

**2:3 Online class captain is recommended by the researcher. (6848:6902) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

Online class captain is recommended by the researcher.

**2:4 Tutorial Letter 101 should explain briefly how F2F tutorial classes wo…… (8654:8881) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

Tutorial Letter 101 should explain briefly how F2F tutorial classes work, where students can access them and how to get a time table for tutorial classes. An application is needed to provide easy access to the tutorial support.

**2:6 The e-tutors are evaluated formatively through monitoring report on a…… (11316:11398) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

The e-tutors are evaluated formatively through monitoring report on a weekly basis

**2:9 Because there is low participation online I then use the medium that t…… (25059:25179) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

Because there is low participation online I then use the medium that they are used to that motivates them to participate.

### 2:11 I ensure that there is proper communication between the tutor and stud…… (26295:26473) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

I ensure that there is proper communication between the tutor and students so that I am able to address what the lecturer is expecting me to address to students during the class.

### 2:15 Each college has a qualification framework and the tutor recruitment i…… (34760:35080) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Each college has a qualification framework and the tutor recruitment is done by HR however, no interviews are done. The process only uses qualification if the tutor qualifies. The challenge with this process is how do we know if the tutor is able to facilitate learning since this is a core function that she must perform

### 2:17 My experience is positive especially in accounting. I came to Unisa no…… (40159:40394) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

My experience is positive especially in accounting. I came to Unisa not knowing this subject but the tutor that was allocated to me helped me to understand accounting and I passed it very well hence I say some provide quality tutoring.

### 2:19 Content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is…… (42869:42961) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Content provided by tutors is of good quality however the challenge is the limited resources.

### 2:28 Employ tutors who have experience in teaching and learning because tho…… (49836:49969) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Employ tutors who have experience in teaching and learning because those who have never taught cannot deliver the content to students

### 2:30 The online tutors should ensure that they post quality content to assi…… (51666:51968) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

The online tutors should ensure that they post quality content to assist students. Some tutors post old information. For instance, a tutor posted content that he posted last year in exact wording nothing changed and this made me to doubt her and I ended up not interacting because I lost faith in her.

### 2:31 If you are not prepared students will see that you are not prepared. (53941:54009) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

If you are not prepared students will see that you are not prepared.

**3:4 Some tutors always have students online. These are tutors who are enga…… (2453:2628) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Some tutors always have students online. These are tutors who are engaging and speak the language of the students, encouraging them and respond to their questions or queries.

**3:12 Tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them…… (17590:17764) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them clear before they start using it with students. Students will post questions, and thereafter will sum up.

**3:19 It is simple with face-to-face because I attend classes. (26385:26440) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

It is simple with face-to-face because I attend classes.

**3:22 The computer labs are not enough and our computers are not well mainta…… (26797:27053) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

The computer labs are not enough and our computers are not well maintained hence they prevent accessibility and we are not able to participate and interact online with fellow students and tutors. It has been six months that some computers are not working.

**4:3 Students should be taught for the first few classes before facilitatio…… (5130:5272) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Students should be taught for the first few classes before facilitation should be done in order for them to adjust easily in the ODEL context.

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## Financial constraints

**5 Quotations:**

**3:20 Students move from rural areas in order to get access to Unisa resourc…… (26442:26610) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Students move from rural areas in order to get access to Unisa resources, computers, tutors online and interact as expected. We do not get help if we stay in such areas.

**4:6 Africanisation and the 4th industrial revolution do not meet. Most stu…… (9070:9266) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Africanisation and the 4th industrial revolution do not meet. Most students move from rural areas to cities in order to access a number of supports that will help them to succeed in their studies.

**4:20 I don’t have taxi fees to access the campus and I feel disadvantaged a…… (31772:31854) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

I don’t have taxi fees to access the campus and I feel disadvantaged and excluded.

**4:21 We still travelling between 160-200km, one hour and half to come and a…… (31856:31958) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

We still travelling between 160-200km, one hour and half to come and attend tutorials every Saturdays.

**4:22 Students come as far as Botswana. Why can’t the university have a camp…… (31960:32262) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Students come as far as Botswana. Why can’t the university have a campus to support such students? Unisa must reach out we cannot suffer as we did in our past apartheid period. Students cannot travel 300km to get support.

Ensure that all students access support nearer to their areas where they live in.

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## Language of teaching and learning

**4 Quotations:**

**3:1 Students do not interact with the tutors because communication is diff…… (1061:1237) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Students do not interact with the tutors because communication is difficult to say what they want to convey to tutors online and face-to-face students are shy to speak in class.

**3:3 Some students are just lurkers and are not interacting online. They op…… (1454:1652) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

Some students are just lurkers and are not interacting online. They open and view the discussion forum. Those who are interacting assist a lot because sometimes the tutor takes too long to respond.

**4:30 nglish is always prioritised when communicating with students (40071:40131) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

nglish is always prioritised when communicating with students

**5:43 Volunteers to work in the labs for assisting in the computer labs othe…… (21547:21943) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

Volunteers to work in the labs for assisting in the computer labs other than the DLAs. These students will be empowered and skilled and be given experience in the workplace. This will help with Africanicity because, as the students assist other students in the labs

and tutorials, they can use their own languages and get explanation in their own languages and dialect understanding will be built.

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## Location of Unisa centres

**10 Quotations:**

**4:2 Community libraries could be used as decentralised venues where studen…… (2582:2810) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Community libraries could be used as decentralised venues where students could access and meet these students halfway. This will minimize traveling and save costs for them while they study with Unisa and get maximum benefits.

**4:14 Bring the ITM to students and not that students should travel a long d…… (28368:28462) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Bring the ITM to students and not that students should travel a long distance to access the ITM

**4:18 The centres should be located within reach where students can access r…… (28260:28365) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

The centres should be located within reach where students can access resources and be involved in the ITM"

**4:19 TM venues must be free of tsotsis. Tsotsis are thugs who target anyone…… (28465:28654) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

TM venues must be free of tsotsis. Tsotsis are thugs who target anyone and rob them of their belongings.

Online modules are strenuous for new students coming from a poor and rural background

**4:20 I don't have taxi fees to access the campus and I feel disadvantaged a…… (31772:31854) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

I don't have taxi fees to access the campus and I feel disadvantaged and excluded.

**4:21 We still travelling between 160-200km, one hour and half to come and a…… (31856:31958) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

We still travelling between 160-200km, one hour and half to come and attend tutorials every Saturdays.

**4:22 Students come as far as Botswana. Why can't the university have a camp…… (31960:32262) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Students come as far as Botswana. Why can't the university have a campus to support such students? Unisa must reach out we cannot suffer as we did in our past apartheid period. Students cannot travel 300km to get support.

Ensure that all students access support nearer to their areas where they live in.

#### 4:25 We still travelling between 160-200km, one hour and half to come and a…… (37235:37337) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

We still travelling between 160-200km, one hour and half to come and attend tutorials every Saturdays.

#### 4:31 Bring the ITM to students and not that students should travel a long d…… (40987:41082) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Bring the ITM to students and not that students should travel a long distance to access the ITM

#### 4:32 ITM venues must be free of tsotsis". Tsotsis are thugs who target anyo…… (41085:41190) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

ITM venues must be free of tsotsis". Tsotsis are thugs who target anyone and rob them of their belongings

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## socialisation and ubuntu

### 8 Quotations:

#### 3:7 Students only interact online during exams because they want to pass a…… (7002:7211) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Students only interact online during exams because they want to pass and want answers for exams. They only want the output and they don't want to go through the process and they are not even penalised for that

#### 4:1 Students coming from rural areas are struggling the most. As an Africa…… (1669:2015) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Students coming from rural areas are struggling the most. As an African institution, a lot is expected from us in order to meet the needs of such students. A student from a first world country, urban area or third world country is treated there the same and not reflecting the elements of Ubuntu and uniqueness to meet individual profile's needs.

#### 4:16 I am majoring in Tshitsonga. The instructions are English and I must t…… (30325:30483) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

I am majoring in Tshitsonga. The instructions are English and I must translate to Tshitsonga for me to answer the questions in English online and face-to-fac.

**4:17 Shared information through the livestreaming could open up possibiliti…… (30486:30690) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Shared information through the livestreaming could open up possibilities of students gathering in the same place in the same location or township and watching the live streaming together and discuss [it]

**4:33 ITM is not hundred percent perfect however there are challenges just l…… (42492:42804) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

ITM is not hundred percent perfect however there are challenges just like any other model".

When you choose to study at Unisa you actually on your own and you need to find someone of the same module to socialise with and assist each other. That is the reason why I come to the campus and get help from my peers.

**5:21 We use a WhatsApp group to enhance our communication. (8028:8081) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

We use a WhatsApp group to enhance our communication.

**5:28 E-tutors have an online platform that they use to interact with studen…… (11974:12229) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

E-tutors have an online platform that they use to interact with students while F2F tutors do not have such a platform hence they end up creating social media platforms to share content because they also need to have an online platform much as they are F2F.

**5:51 Peer to peer learning should be done because students learn better wit…… (24904:24980) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

Peer to peer learning should be done because students learn better with peers

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## Project: DATA ANALYSIS FOR ITM PROJECT

Report created by Ntulichs on 2020/10/29

## Code Report

(7) codes
Local filters:

Show codes in group Improvement of the ITM

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- **collaboration and partnership**

## 8 Quotations:

### 2:16 sms communication system is utilised to ensure that the content of com…… (37641:38024) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

sms communication system is utilised to ensure that the content of communication is correct, e.g., tutorial cancellation and commencement of tutorial classes. F910 is very good and I commend the initiators of the function". (F910 is a communication system that was designed by the regions in collaboration with ICT to assist with communicating tutorial related matters to students.)

### 3:8 Unisa has made resources accessible to students but the accessibility…… (7213:7610) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Unisa has made resources accessible to students but the accessibility should be measured with the usability. The two are power twins. It doesn't help to make resources accessible if they are not used by students. Hence, Academic Support Coordinators (ASCs) and Digital Literacy Advisors (DLAs) work together to train students on Microsoft packages that will enable them to do their online modules.

### 3:13 Community of Practice (COP) for tutors of the same module should come…… (17766:17908) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Community of Practice (COP) for tutors of the same module should come together online and share the best practices that would improve tutoring.

### 3:15 They should create the same understanding, have a tutor-tutor interact…… (21273:21412) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

They should create the same understanding, have a tutor-tutor interaction where they tutor the same module, even if it is a WhatsApp group.

### 3:28 Unisa should reconsider to go back to assist students to access MyUnis…… (35429:35553) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Unisa should reconsider to go back to assist students to access MyUnisa using service providers like MTN, Vodacom and Cell C

### 5:23 I work as an e-tutor and as F2F tutor. I see the effort being put in b…… (8566:8764) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

I work as an e-tutor and as F2F tutor. I see the effort being put in both tutorial programmes by academics. To avoid such differences and tutors resigning from F2F to online, better [to] mix them.

### 5:27 Team Geeks which collaborated with all Unisa campuses around Gauteng t…… (11242:11602) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Team Geeks which collaborated with all Unisa campuses around Gauteng to provide computer skills to children so that a good computer skills foundation should be built.

These are good efforts aiming at empowering learners from basic education. Unisa should collaborate with such companies in order to provide computer training to its students wherever they are.

**5:28 E-tutors have an online platform that they use to interact with studen…… (11974:12229) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

E-tutors have an online platform that they use to interact with students while F2F tutors do not have such a platform hence they end up creating social media platforms to share content because they also need to have an online platform much as they are F2F.

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## ● Expansion of telecentres

**10 Quotations:**

**3:23 I don't have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the c…… (29640:29823) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

I don't have a device for me to access MyUnisa. I stay far from the centre, when I come to do my assignment online I find that the queue is too long and I cannot access the computer.

**4:2 Community libraries could be used as decentralised venues where studen…… (2582:2810) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Community libraries could be used as decentralised venues where students could access and meet these students halfway. This will minimize traveling and save costs for them while they study with Unisa and get maximum benefits.

**4:10 Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resourc…… (14157:14440) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Why put centres in the cities because such people already have resources and access to internet and Wi-Fi? But people in the rural areas do not have such. Unisa must rethink this strategy; we need to put centres in poor areas where students have difficulty accessing these resources.

**4:12 Mpumalanga is a very big province and there are many students in this…… (24182:24426) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Mpumalanga is a very big province and there are many students in this region. There are only two centres, i.e., Nelspruit and Middleburg. Unisa needs to do its analysis well and establish another centre in order to increase access for students.

**4:13 The centres should be located within reach where students can access r…… (28260:28366) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

The centres should be located within reach where students can access resources and be involved in the ITM".

**4:15 ITM venues must be free of tsotsis. Tsotsis are thugs who target anyon…… (28464:28655) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

ITM venues must be free of tsotsis. Tsotsis are thugs who target anyone and rob them of their belongings.

Online modules are strenuous for new students coming from a poor and rural background.

**4:22 Students come as far as Botswana. Why can't the university have a camp…… (31960:32262) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM**

Students come as far as Botswana. Why can't the university have a campus to support such students? Unisa must reach out we cannot suffer as we did in our past apartheid period. Students cannot travel 300km to get support.

Ensure that all students access support nearer to their areas where they live in.

**5:29 Training of the facilitator in the telecentres is done through ICT and…… (12231:12435) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

Training of the facilitator in the telecentres is done through ICT and regions on how to navigate MyUnisa and how to get into the online platform for students to access their online modules for learning.

**5:40 The telecentres should be evaluated to see if it meets the needs of st…… (18416:18492) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

The telecentres should be evaluated to see if it meets the needs of students.

**5:47 Expand telecentres to provide access to students since Unisa is the un…… (22797:23209) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

Expand telecentres to provide access to students since Unisa is the university of the Land. Telecentres are being rented by the university and owned by the private people however they are not connected to Wi-Fi, computers have issues and the owners said 'I don't know how to help you, call your university'. Also place Unisa staff members who know exactly how to assist students when they go to these telecentres.

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## ● Integration of the ITM

**10 Quotations:**

**3:25 If you do not have a laptop it is a challenge to be fully committed, I…… (31934:32087) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM**

If you do not have a laptop it is a challenge to be fully committed, I cannot share what I studied with other students online but can do it face-to-face.

### 3:30 Integrated part: The model is not integrated and students do not parti…… (39683:40169) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Integrated part: The model is not integrated and students do not participate. As a f2f tutor whatever I do in class I also try to do it online so that I can ensure the integratedness of the system however students do not see that until they ask a question or request for a material that will respond to their questions asked in class. What I do, I just refer them to the online classroom where I upload the material and they are amazed to show that they do not go online and participat

### 4:16 I am majoring in Tshitsonga. The instructions are English and I must t…… (30325:30483) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

I am majoring in Tshitsonga. The instructions are English and I must translate to Tshitsonga for me to answer the questions in English online and face-to-fac.

### 5:11 I am not sure about the integrated part of the model because a lot mus…… (4213:4378) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

I am not sure about the integrated part of the model because a lot must still change in the ITM. To me, Unisa is still running two parallel tutor support programmes.

### 5:12 For me there are actually three programmes running parallel, i.e., F2F…… (4379:4545) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

For me there are actually three programmes running parallel, i.e., F2F, e-tutor as well as TAs. At least, integrate the tutor support programmes for quality purposes.

### 5:13 the model would be integrated if there was continuity from the classro…… (4585:4676) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

the model would be integrated if there was continuity from the classroom to online support.

### 5:15 For me there are actually three programmes running parallel, i.e., F2F…… (5266:5432) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

For me there are actually three programmes running parallel, i.e., F2F, e-tutor as well as TAs. At least, integrate the tutor support programmes for quality purposes.

### 5:16 The model would be integrated if there was continuity from the classro…… (5435:5524) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

The model would be integrated if there was continuity from the classroom to online support

**5:25 F2F do their own thing with very little or no support from module lect…… (9968:10208) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

F2F do their own thing with very little or no support from module lecturers whereas e-tutors get all the support, for example, prescribed books, tutor guidelines, monitoring by academics as well as quality assurance for the work done online"

**5:30 I am aware that some colleges have integrated F2F tutors in the online…… (12438:12931) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated**

I am aware that some colleges have integrated F2F tutors in the online discussion forums however, the majority have not done so. This is unfair for F2F tutors because they will not have a bigger picture of students' problems and help by fixing them in F2F tutorial classes on Saturdays. Some F2F also operate as e-tutors which is a good thing to do by those colleges who are doing it. I believe that the university should start integrating these tutors to perform a F2F and an online function.

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## ITM systems improvement

**19 Quotations:**

**2:16 sms communication system is utilised to ensure that the content of com…… (37641:38024) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

sms communication system is utilised to ensure that the content of communication is correct, e.g., tutorial cancellation and commencement of tutorial classes. F910 is very good and I commend the initiators of the function". (F910 is a communication system that was designed by the regions in collaboration with ICT to assist with communicating tutorial related matters to students.)

**2:21 Quality of communication leaves a lot to be desired because the centre…… (43161:43503) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

Quality of communication leaves a lot to be desired because the centre advertises for modules that will be offered however, you find that they are not offered until the semester is finished. No regional staff communicates why the modules were not offered. What is promised to students is not received. False expectations are created by Unisa.

**2:25 Quality for me starts with a proper communication strategy used by Uni…… (48774:48965) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

Quality for me starts with a proper communication strategy used by Unisa to communicate to Unisa students. Why I am saying that, it is because we will not win if our communication is not good.

**2:26 The task team was set [up] to look at tutor appointments, standardisat…… (48967:49198) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM**

The task team was set [up] to look at tutor appointments, standardisation, monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure that everything is properly managed within the college. Everyone is involved in the tutor recruitment process".

### 3:9 Unisa has a lot of resources however, they are not well communicated t…… (7612:7727) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Unisa has a lot of resources however, they are not well communicated to students so that they use them as intended.

### 3:29 For me, Simplicity is key. With MyUnisa it is not easy to access inste…… (38687:38911) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

For me, Simplicity is key. With MyUnisa it is not easy to access instead one has to go from page to page to get to online discussions. The platform is a problem and a challenge for us to engage and interact in a discussion.

### 5:1 I will evaluate the HR space, processes and procedures that will assis…… (629:722) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

I will evaluate the HR space, processes and procedures that will assist the model to succeed.

### 5:6 Tutoring should be recognised and be taken seriously at Unisa especial…… (2526:2734) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Tutoring should be recognised and be taken seriously at Unisa especially by academics. Some academics do not see the relevance of the tutor support. They feel that it is too much work and is a waste of money.

### 5:7 We need to evaluate the current systems and ensure that ICT develops a…… (2736:2929) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

We need to evaluate the current systems and ensure that ICT develops a system that will help students change themselves or schedule themselves on the time table … to eliminate personal clashes.

### 5:9 Decisions taken by colleges regarding support services in terms of HR…… (3052:3231) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Decisions taken by colleges regarding support services in terms of HR offering should be communicated with the regional staff from the beginning and not late for planning purposes

### 5:10 Academics need to support tutors both face-to-face and e-tutors. Let u…… (3959:4210) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Academics need to support tutors both face-to-face and e-tutors. Let us be accessible and available to students … Change the minds of academics to view tutors as a group of people who are milking the cow and add no value to students' learning journey.

### 5:12 For me there are actually three programmes running parallel, i.e., F2F…… (4379:4545) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

For me there are actually three programmes running parallel, i.e., F2F, e-tutor as well as TAs. At least, integrate the tutor support programmes for quality purposes.

### 5:15 For me there are actually three programmes running parallel, i.e., F2F…… (5266:5432) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

For me there are actually three programmes running parallel, i.e., F2F, e-tutor as well as TAs. At least, integrate the tutor support programmes for quality purposes.

### 5:16 The model would be integrated if there was continuity from the classro…… (5435:5524) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

The model would be integrated if there was continuity from the classroom to online support

### 5:17 There is a need to evaluate HR since there is too much delay in the ap…… (5897:6004) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

There is a need to evaluate HR since there is too much delay in the appointment of tutors on an annual basis

### 5:18 I feel that HR is failing ITM because it delays the appointment of tut…… (6006:6097) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

I feel that HR is failing ITM because it delays the appointment of tutors year in, year out.

### 5:23 I work as an e-tutor and as F2F tutor. I see the effort being put in b…… (8566:8764) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

I work as an e-tutor and as F2F tutor. I see the effort being put in both tutorial programmes by academics. To avoid such differences and tutors resigning from F2F to online, better [to] mix them.

### 5:30 I am aware that some colleges have integrated F2F tutors in the online…… (12438:12931) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

I am aware that some colleges have integrated F2F tutors in the online discussion forums however, the majority have not done so. This is unfair for F2F tutors because they will not have a bigger picture of students' problems and help by fixing them in F2F tutorial classes on Saturdays. Some F2F also operate as e-tutors which is a good thing to do by those colleges who are doing it. I believe that the university should start integrating these tutors to perform a F2F and an online function.

### 5:31 Creating systems that will take away a lot of manual work and work sma…… (13491:13786) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Creating systems that will take away a lot of manual work and work smart, alleviating a lot of mistakes especially in the statistical part. The system should be integrated, creating a time-table with information that already exists in the system. This will eliminate human error and save time.

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## ● Reward for participation

### 7 Quotations:

#### 3:7 Students only interact online during exams because they want to pass a…… (7002:7211) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Students only interact online during exams because they want to pass and want answers for exams. They only want the output and they don't want to go through the process and they are not even penalised for that

#### 3:12 Tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them…… (17590:17764) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Tutors create rules of engagement on the WhatsApp group and make them clear before they start using it with students. Students will post questions, and thereafter will sum up.

#### 4:8 Does the infrastructure include our student because, when we conduct o…… (11233:11516) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Does the infrastructure include our student because, when we conduct online classes and VC classes, if the infrastructure is not well off in rural areas, such students are automatically excluded from the support that Unisa wants to provide for them. Students need access to internet.

#### 4:17 Shared information through the livestreaming could open up possibiliti…… (30486:30690) - D 4: Q4- Africanisation of the ITM

Shared information through the livestreaming could open up possibilities of students gathering in the same place in the same location or township and watching the live streaming together and discuss [it]

#### 5:4 The assessment plan to incorporate a mark that will increase participa…… (1585:1737) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

The assessment plan to incorporate a mark that will increase participation … The incentive on the participation of students will motivate them to engage

#### 5:8 This initiative should be properly planned and incorporated into the e…… (2931:3050) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

This initiative should be properly planned and incorporated into the existing plans that speak to assessment of students

### 5:19 The issue of incentivising students when they interact and participate…… (6101:6577) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

The issue of incentivising students when they interact and participate online was tested in one college whereby the lecturer said 10% of their pass mark will come from online participation. The module did very well in terms of online participation. No one wants to lose a mark. Other lecturers doubted [this] however, ultimately bought into the idea and participation rate increased a lot. All modules in this college are now standing at not less than 70% participation rate.

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## ● Stakeholders relationship building

**19 Quotations:**

### 2:1 The involvement of lecturers is very important in the sense that the l…… (3413:3862) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

The involvement of lecturers is very important in the sense that the lecturer can go through the information that is posted by the tutor and confirm its relevancy however if the lecturer is not involved there is a compromise of quality … Lecturers are minimally involved in this process and this only compromises quality because they are the ones who must check the quality of personnel employed for tutoring, I am speaking for my college of course.

### 2:14 Module lecturers should be involved and they should receive the work p…… (32751:32949) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Module lecturers should be involved and they should receive the work plan and comment based on the tutor guideline they sent to tutors. The tutor and module lecturer should sing from the same note.

### 2:26 The task team was set [up] to look at tutor appointments, standardisat…… (48967:49198) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

The task team was set [up] to look at tutor appointments, standardisation, monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure that everything is properly managed within the college. Everyone is involved in the tutor recruitment process".

### 3:2 Communities of Practice (COP) should be joined by the lecturers so tha…… (1239:1335) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

Communities of Practice (COP) should be joined by the lecturers so that they are on the same page

### 3:10 The lecturer's dedication and involvement to support the tutor plays a…… (10920:11181) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

The lecturer's dedication and involvement to support the tutor plays a very big role because if the lecturer has less interest and [is] less involved, the tutor tends to relax because she knows that the lecturer is not interested in the tutor support programme.

### 3:15 They should create the same understanding, have a tutor-tutor interact…… (21273:21412) - D 3: Q3-Access and Participation in the ITM

They should create the same understanding, have a tutor-tutor interaction where they tutor the same module, even if it is a WhatsApp group.

### 5:2 by limiting the number of the stakeholders involved in the appointment…… (1269:1432) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

by limiting the number of the stakeholders involved in the appointment of tutors. If a single office deals with this, it would be easy and quick to appoint [them].

### 5:5 Communication is very poor at Unisa Centre for Professional Developmen…… (1884:2245) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Communication is very poor at Unisa Centre for Professional Development (CPD) is like a sponge and just absorb. Out of 1000 applicants, we only appointed 10 people. We don't know where they are. All cracks are always blamed by HR. Other stakeholders do not come together as one towards a common goal. We will always fail because we do not communicate properly.

### 5:6 Tutoring should be recognised and be taken seriously at Unisa especial…… (2526:2734) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Tutoring should be recognised and be taken seriously at Unisa especially by academics. Some academics do not see the relevance of the tutor support. They feel that it is too much work and is a waste of money.

### 5:9 Decisions taken by colleges regarding support services in terms of HR…… (3052:3231) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Decisions taken by colleges regarding support services in terms of HR offering should be communicated with the regional staff from the beginning and not late for planning purposes

### 5:10 Academics need to support tutors both face-to-face and e-tutors. Let u…… (3959:4210) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Academics need to support tutors both face-to-face and e-tutors. Let us be accessible and available to students … Change the minds of academics to view tutors as a group of people who are milking the cow and add no value to students' learning journey.

### 5:14 Break the ranking and bureaucracy that exists in the system and delays…… (4890:5261) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Break the ranking and bureaucracy that exists in the system and delays, e.g., contracting of the tutors. These ranks do not address quality management at all instead it ticks the box we think it addresses quality. If these ranks are removed, we will have to come up with quality management systems that would address corruption. It has nothing to do with the core business

### 5:18 I feel that HR is failing ITM because it delays the appointment of tut…… (6006:6097) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

I feel that HR is failing ITM because it delays the appointment of tutors year in, year out.

### 5:20 On a yearly basis lecturers should discuss problem areas with tutors s…… (7870:8026) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

On a yearly basis lecturers should discuss problem areas with tutors so that tutors are able to tackle these areas in class as part of the plan for the year.

### 5:22 This could be enforced by the primary lecturer who will schedule VC di…… (8144:8564) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

This could be enforced by the primary lecturer who will schedule VC discussion groups that will be spearheaded by the tutors in order to show students that tutors know what the primary lecturer knows and the two work as a team. This should be done in the presence of a lecturer. Each tutor [is] to be given a topic to address during the VC because they are capable and able to address academic issues in their capacity.

### 5:23 I work as an e-tutor and as F2F tutor. I see the effort being put in b…… (8566:8764) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

I work as an e-tutor and as F2F tutor. I see the effort being put in both tutorial programmes by academics. To avoid such differences and tutors resigning from F2F to online, better [to] mix them.

### 5:25 F2F do their own thing with very little or no support from module lect…… (9968:10208) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

F2F do their own thing with very little or no support from module lecturers whereas e-tutors get all the support, for example, prescribed books, tutor guidelines, monitoring by academics as well as quality assurance for the work done online”

### 5:28 E-tutors have an online platform that they use to interact with studen…… (11974:12229) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

E-tutors have an online platform that they use to interact with students while F2F tutors do not have such a platform hence they end up creating social media platforms to share content because they also need to have an online platform much as they are F2F.

### 5:52 To enhance this relationship so that lecturers are able to engage with…… (25119:25625) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

To enhance this relationship so that lecturers are able to engage with us with the latest developments within the module e.g. when the legislation has changed, accounting standards that changes, lecturers are the ones who should call an online meeting or VC and talk about these issues so that we, as tutors, are able to take this further to our students in class. We need to keep abreast with the latest developments and be on par with what is happening on the ground regarding the module we are tutoring.

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## ● Tutor contracts, recruitment and payment

### 13 Quotations:

#### 2:1 The involvement of lecturers is very important in the sense that the l…… (3413:3862) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

The involvement of lecturers is very important in the sense that the lecturer can go through the information that is posted by the tutor and confirm its relevancy however if the lecturer is not involved there is a compromise of quality … Lecturers are minimally involved in this process and this only compromises quality because they are the ones who must check the quality of personnel employed for tutoring, I am speaking for my college of course.

#### 2:2 There is a huge gap between the e-tutors and F2F tutors; the scale of…… (5990:6181) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

There is a huge gap between the e-tutors and F2F tutors; the scale of F2F tutors should be increased since their tutorial sessions are more hectic and they travel to the venue to see students.

#### 2:8 There is a huge gap between the e-tutors and F2F tutors; the scale of…… (20927:21119) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

There is a huge gap between the e-tutors and F2F tutors; the scale of F2F tutors should be increased since their tutorial sessions are more hectic and they travel to the venue to see students.

#### 2:15 Each college has a qualification framework and the tutor recruitment i…… (34760:35080) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Each college has a qualification framework and the tutor recruitment is done by HR however, no interviews are done. The process only uses qualification if the tutor qualifies. The challenge with this process is how do we know if the tutor is able to facilitate learning since this is a core function that she must perform

#### 2:24 Quality measure starts from recruitment stage. (46499:46545) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

Quality measure starts from recruitment stage.

### 2:26 The task team was set [up] to look at tutor appointments, standardisat…… (48967:49198) - D 2: Q2-Quality of ITM

The task team was set [up] to look at tutor appointments, standardisation, monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure that everything is properly managed within the college. Everyone is involved in the tutor recruitment process".

### 5:2 by limiting the number of the stakeholders involved in the appointment…… (1269:1432) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

by limiting the number of the stakeholders involved in the appointment of tutors. If a single office deals with this, it would be easy and quick to appoint [them].

### 5:3 Advertisements for tutors for recruitment should go out in June in ord…… (1435:1583) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Advertisements for tutors for recruitment should go out in June in order to meet the deadline just before examination period; the earlier the better.

### 5:14 Break the ranking and bureaucracy that exists in the system and delays…… (4890:5261) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Break the ranking and bureaucracy that exists in the system and delays, e.g., contracting of the tutors. These ranks do not address quality management at all instead it ticks the box we think it addresses quality. If these ranks are removed, we will have to come up with quality management systems that would address corruption. It has nothing to do with the core business

### 5:17 There is a need to evaluate HR since there is too much delay in the ap…… (5897:6004) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

There is a need to evaluate HR since there is too much delay in the appointment of tutors on an annual basis

### 5:18 I feel that HR is failing ITM because it delays the appointment of tut…… (6006:6097) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

I feel that HR is failing ITM because it delays the appointment of tutors year in, year out.

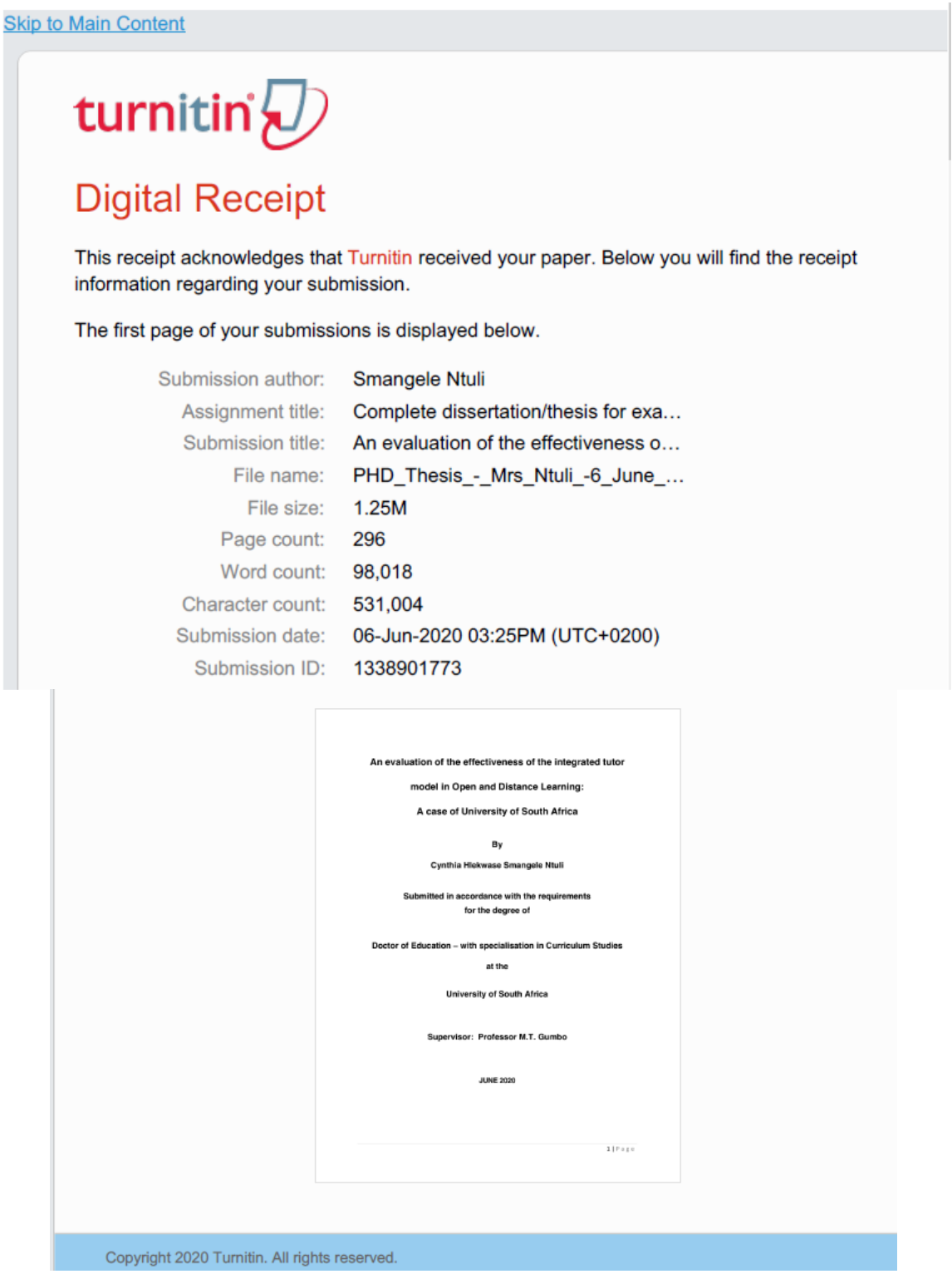
### 5:42 Consider employing tutors who are Unisa alumni first because they unde…… (21159:21543) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Consider employing tutors who are Unisa alumni first because they understand the learning system and will be able to support students appropriately. Those who were educated at campus based universities like University of Johannesburg and Pretoria do not have the necessarily experience that will understand students and have the techniques of supporting these students from experience.

### 5:49 Prioritise employing Unisa alumni. (23832:23867) - D 5: Q5-What needs to be evaluated

Prioritise employing Unisa alumni.

## Appendix 19: Turnitin digital receipt



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An evaluation of the effectiveness of the integrated tutor model in Open and Distance Learning:
A case of University of South Africa

By
Cynthia Hlekwase Smangele Ntuli

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education – with specialisation in Curriculum Studies
at the
University of South Africa

Supervisor: Professor M.T. Gumbo

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